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Adventure

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JEWELS FOR A LADY

by

H. BEDFORD-JONES

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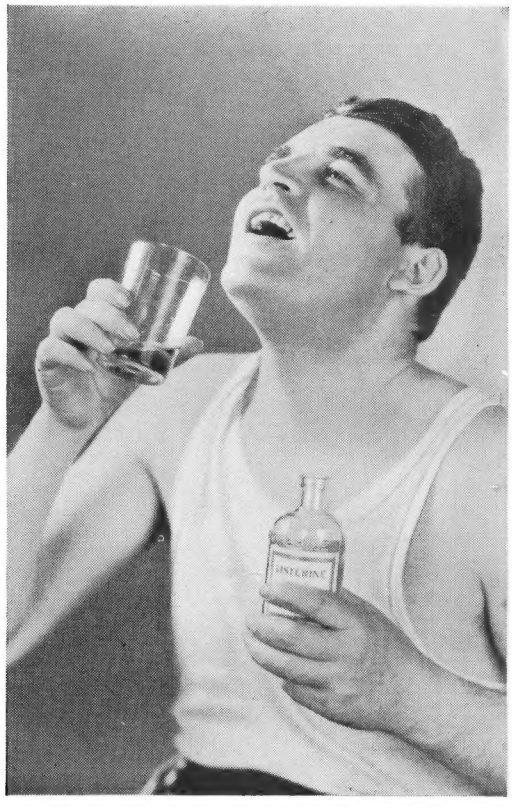

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JEWELS FOR A LADY

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

DOYLE staggered on deck; he knew only that he must be aboard a ship. His last memory was confused—a card game at the Raffles, a midnight scurry about the streets for drinks and deviltry, and oblivion somewhere *en route* before Doyle had expected it.

Now he came up into the sunlight, blinking. Sunlight of the China Sea, white and bright and merciless. Singapore somewhere over the horizon, the straits sparkling all around, blue mountains lifting out of the water to east and south. The ship was headed north, then. But Lord! A ship! How the devil had he ever got aboard her? Surely he was not shanghaied, like the men in stories?

No, not that; a dozen little things told him as much. The cabin where he had wakened, his own clothes, the scene around him. Long handled holystones were squeaking on the deck; scrubbing brushes were at work; flat-chested brown men directed liquid eyes upon him with placid unconcern. No white man in sight. A little ship, certainly—a pounding and throbbing little ship. A life preserver hung on the rail and Doyle stared at the name of her, the queer words *Ming Wang* of Hongkong.

The fresh sea wind quickly cleared his head and he looked around—a thin, slim figure of a man in his prime of thirty years, fair reddish hair tangled about his brow,

A Novelette of the China Seas

and blue eyes. The whole description of the man lay in those eyes of his, for they were such as the old sagaman loved to call "sharp and piercing", even in this moment of blank awakening. The lascars who met his gaze looked away quickly and held to their work.

A little ship, yes; an old ship, some barge of a coaster, no doubt, Chinese owned. Doyle turned, for he was at the break of the bridge, and then halted sharply. He had a swift vision of a woman passing—a woman who looked at him, nodded, smiled and was gone. Something about her drove into him; her walk, perhaps. He could not tell whether she were young or old, pretty or ugly; he remembered only that lightly floating walk, the swift, lithe step that carried her from his sight. Like a man in a dream, he turned to the ladder.

"Am I still drugged or drunk?" he thought, a little dazed. "She spoke to me, took me as a matter of course; yet I never saw her or this ship in my life before this moment. I'm not a fool, but there's something queer here."

Right enough there—James Doyle was no fool. Singapore knew him, indeed, as a man who had gone into the islands some years previously and had come out with a small fortune; and when men looked into his eyes, they knew why.

Up above, standing outside the wheelhouse and calmly surveying him as he rose, Doyle came face to face with a man.

The four stripes, the oak leaves, the air of command; here, then, was the captain of the *Ming Wang!* Yet for a moment Doyle stood silent, returning that calm gaze, wondering within himself. The broad ruddy face, whiskered to the faded eyes with grayish, carefully tended beard, held an impassivity, a force, an intelligence which astonished him.

"Nice morning, Mr. Doyle," came the greeting. "You remember our meeting last night? I'm Cap'n Harper, of course."

"Yes?" Doyle met a smile, a hearty hand grip. "I'm afraid I don't remember—"

Harper shrugged, took his arm, walked him to the port rail.

"Listen to me, Doyle," he said calmly. "I know you don't. Just between you and me, remembrance is a devilish unpleasant thing at times. I might say, by the way, that Pennington of the Island Export Company recommended you to me. Was trying to catch you all last night and only ran into you with a gang at Hankow John's bar."

"Oh!" said Doyle vaguely. "Pennington—yes. Old partner of mine. Ran into me, eh?"

"Exactly." Harper had an odd, clipped manner of speech, a trifle unnatural. "Ran into you and fetched you aboard—no time to lose, you understand. No time to stand on trifles, either. Beautiful morning, isn't it? Odd to think that some day we'll never wake up and see the sun glinting on the seas, yet they'll run along for years unending and never miss us."

"Come across," commanded Doyle abruptly, swinging the older man around, facing him. "What d'you mean—you fetched me aboard? Drugged me?"

"Of course." Captain Harper surveyed him unsmilingly, almost reflectively, as he made this singular confession. "You see, Doyle, I know Pennington well. Found out about my situation only at seven last night, looked up Pennington, and he couldn't help me. He said you'd do it like a shot, and glad of the chance. Too late to change my plans—I had to sail at eleven. So I ran you down and here we are."

"Shanghaied, am I?" he said. "I'll be damned! What's the big idea, Harper? Which of us is crazy?"

"Pennington said you'd understand—you're the right sort," he made slow answer. "Madness is only relative, after all; you should know that, Doyle. I had to act quick and sharp and I acted. Look at the other side of it. You were drunk and in with a gang all set to rob you—"

"Never mind me or my morals," intervened Doyle sharply. "As a matter of fact, I was playing that bunch of dogfish along, and a friend o' mine was stepping in at midnight to work the reverse English on them. Of course they were crooks. Of course they were trying to rob me. But they had money, and your blasted interference cost us about five hundred quid."

Harper waved his blunt fingered hand. "I'll make it up to you," he said, as though five hundred pounds were nothing at all. "Want to talk now, or do you feel like lying down for a bit?"

"Talk," said Doyle, finding his cigaret case and getting out a smoke. "I'm all right. Let's get this jumble settled here and now. Women aboard, aren't there?"

"Eh?" The faded eyes sharpened and struck at him. "How d'you know?"

"Met a woman on my way here."

"Exactly. My niece, sir," said Harper, with a certain dignity, and straightened his wide shouldered figure. "As you may have gathered, this condemned hooker is not much of a ship; she's a coaster, ready to fall apart, and she'd drive any sane man out of his head. Poor old Macartney, my chief, isn't much to begin with—he's past seventy and addled in his head—but he keeps her engines going. He's the only other white man aboard. You'll not meet him; he comes up to mess but we're not on speaking terms."

DOYLE smoked and said nothing. Harper pulled out a huge bulldog pipe and filled it from a rubber pouch. He looked like a modern Neptune as he puffed and stared out across the sunlit water.

"Left my wife in Saigon on the way

down, in hospital," he resumed. "My niece was due in S'pore, out from home—had to pick her up, you see. My blasted Hongkong owners got me a charter north, a lot of trade goods to Kuala Lembang; it's on the east coast, a small state run for profit by its rajah—"

"Spare the details. I've been there," said Doyle dryly. "I had my own private war with Rajah Mutamid two years ago, and the sharp devil licked me. I'll even up with him some day. It's the dirtiest hole this side Kuchang. So you're going there, eh?"

Captain Harper nodded.

"And that is exactly the trouble," he returned. "Yesterday I learned most disquieting news. That blasted Rajah Mutamid has been in S'pore the past fortnight. Met Ellen there—my niece, you know—and has been playing up to her. He's gone home now. She's just out, and he's an Oxford man and no end clever, and the blasted nigger flashed his jewelry and so forth and it made a lot o' talk. Not that Ellen was taken in, but any girl would be flattered by attentions from a rajah, you understand. She's always out for a bit of a lark, doesn't take things seriously. And I know damned well this charter to Kuala Lembang was a put up job. Mutamid wants to get her there."

"Huh!" Doyle grunted. "Why didn't you ship her north by a Messageries to Saigon, instead of taking her?"

"Boat pulled out yesterday morning, and there's no other for a week. Besides, I didn't know then, about—"

"Well, out with it!" said Doyle impatiently. "You know a lot I don't know. What's all that got to do with me? Or with Pennington?"

"Hm! All that? Everything. I've been off my feed for a bit, queer spells and so forth. This blasted business laid me out last night, and Pennington called in a doctor. Hm! Had to have a man aboard I could trust, it seemed. Devilish nuisance, let me tell you, sir!"

"Look here, you don't mean that?" Doyle exclaimed. "Not as bad as that?"

"Worse," said Captain Harper, with a nod and a long pull at his pipe. "Heart, the blasted sawbones said it was. Told me I'd have to ship into drydock for a month or two and do nothing. Or else take my chance. So I set out after you and got you and cleared out o' S'pore anyhow. Feel better at sea. You know how it is, I expect; a chap can always think clearer at sea, and it's a cleaner way to have the end come. Not that it matters a tinker's dam about the end—we're all born to die. But this trip, d'ye see, it's a gamble. If nothing happens, all right. May nothing happen at Kuala Lembang. May be all my blasted notions."

"Sorry to hear all that," said Doyle slowly, more than a little shocked by this abrupt disclosure. "I hope there's a mistake—there usually is. But why didn't you just leave the lady in Singapore, stay over with her?"

"Don't be a fool," said Captain Harper gruffly. "This is my ship, ain't it? And like I tell you, it's perhaps all blasted nonsense. But I had to have a chap I could trust. Look here, I've a bit o' money saved up. I'll do the right thing by you, Doyle—"

"Oh, shut up," said Doyle, irritated. There broke upon him the vision of this man, helpless ashore, feeling himself stricken, perhaps dying, with a woman in charge and a ship under his hand—and Rajah Mutamid up in Kuala Lembang. A man harried by suspicion, by disease, by duty; a man alone . . .

"Nothing to do about it," said Doyle, turning away. "As for payment, forget it. I'm no pauper, and if I can be of any help, right! Besides, I have a little score with that swine Mutamid, and if the chance comes to settle it—"

Harper reached out and gripped his arm and swung him around.

"Hold on, Doyle. It's white of you to take it like this—"

"Not a bit of it," said Doyle. "It's common sense. Besides, I expect things aren't so bad as you imagine, by a long shot; things never are. It's the unexpected and the unimagined that hits you when you're not looking. Well, forget it

temporarily. I'm not feeling so first-chop after all; think I'll take a look-see around and lie down a bit and get a clear head. When do we reach Kuala Lembang?"

"Three days, with luck," said Captain Harper. Doyle nodded and turned to the ladder.

II

DOYLE located the cabin in which he had awakened, threw the whole perplexing affair off his mind and went to sleep.

When he once more came to himself it was close to sunset, the *Ming Wang* was rolling like a canal barge and Mr. Doyle's head was clear and entirely itself again. He lighted a cigaret, sat on the edge of his bunk and considered the situation.

He remembered everything said by Captain Harper and felt a swift pity for that desperate seaman. As far as he himself was regarded, Doyle was supremely unworried; he had no objection whatever to going to Kuala Lembang, particularly if there were any likelihood of his settling old scores with wily Rajah Mutamid.

"But there isn't," he assured himself, as he rose and began to dress. "Not a chance in the world. Poor Harper exaggerates the whole business, his own end of it included. Thinks he's apt to die at any minute, when as a matter of fact he'll probably live to eighty. He isn't used to dealing with natives, and somebody has been pumping him full of hot air about Mutamid. Not so bad, anyhow; I'll see him out of Kuala Lembang and may pick up a bit of profitable business for myself before catching the next boat back to Singapore."

He had been in Kuala Lembang once, for his sins. It was a tiny port inside the islands, a river mouth and a thatched village, and a palace on the hill beyond. Mutamid was a rajah by birth and courtesy; his territory was insignificant, his wealth dependent on his rubber plantations, and his power strictly limited. He was not even worth a British resident, which left him pretty much a free hand; but as his affairs were largely handled from Singapore, he had no great opportunity to play any tricks.

So, accepting matters with a shrug, Mr. Doyle sought the deck. Curiously enough, the one thing lingering in his mind was the glimpse of that girl he had caught—the peculiar sensation of sheer beauty that had pierced into him. It is like this with a man, sometimes, as though for an instant the inner eye of his spirit is open to singular perceptions he can not normally see. Just the glimpse of a girl walking—nothing about her personally—had filled Doyle with curiosity.

And now he saw her again, walking across the well deck toward the ladder. He stood gazing down at her, watching her. Yes, there was something in that swinging, lithe gait of hers which was different; yet it did not bring him the strange sense of beauty his first glimpse had wakened. She looked up, nodded, and he pointed upward. At her assent Doyle went on up to the bridge deck and was standing there when she came up. Captain Harper was not in sight; a brown man had the wheel, chewing betel paste, occasionally spitting to leeward.

"You're Mr. Doyle? I'm glad to meet you, glad you're here," she said simply. "Let's go over to the port rail and watch the sunset—the clouds are wonderful."

Doyle assented. He would not call her beautiful, he decided. She was very small—a little delicate thing—yet she had an odd way of throwing all her personality into her voice when she spoke; it fairly drove at one. And her lips opened widely, giving her words an air of enthusiasm; either very affected or very natural. Very natural, thought Doyle, and her eyes were faintly blue and clear, fearless, honest eyes. Yes, she would be the type to do as she liked and not care what the world thought. Within limits.

"You seem to know a lot about me," observed Doyle dryly. She gave him a sidelong look and laughed a little.

"Oh, I do. Uncle was telling me how you came out of Sumatra last year with that museum expedition and how you had killed a native chief and were—"

"All nonsense," cut in Doyle sharply. "He's been filling you up with bosh. Why do you suppose I'm aboard, eh?"

"To look after me if anything happens," she said.

"Oh!" Doyle was taken aback. "You mean he told you all about it?"

"Of course. Why not?" Her eyes ran over his face, appraisingly. "I'm not a child, you know. Isn't it pitiful to see a man like my uncle—a viking, a perfect type of strength, a man of position—surrounded by obstacles, hemmed in by difficulties, with death waiting to strike at him any instant?"

"Hm!" said Doyle, looking out at the sunset reddened sky and sea. "Yes, but then—that's life. A chap can't go by looks in this world. I used to know a man down at Thursday Island; handsome as a picture, rich as a king, with pearls in his safe would knock your eyes out—and he didn't dare let any one look at the palms of his hands. All he had to do in life was to wait."

"For what?" She gave him a quick, birdlike glance.

"Leprosy," said Doyle. "And he'd have swapped places with any beachcomber that was clean, you bet, except the government's put him away by now."

"Oh!" She was silent for a little, then she turned to him abruptly. "I suppose uncle told you all about me?"

"Some," Doyle was cautious here. "Your first trip out, isn't it?"

"Oh, don't be silly," she returned. "About my needing a guardian, I mean. And why he got you aboard. About my foolish actions in Singapore."

Doyle looked at her, met her eyes and grinned.

"You're honest, aren't you?" he said, and chuckled. "I mean—you don't tell lies."

"No. I like honest people who haven't anything to conceal."

"Then why, in heaven's name, did you take a notion to like Rajah Mutamid?"

She smiled suddenly at him.

"Because he told me right out that he was a bad egg."

"Oh!" Doyle understood suddenly. "And you were fresh from home, and you thought it would be fine to show your defiance of what everybody was thinking, and so forth. Sort of dared you, eh? Yes, he's a clever beggar. He knows how to work the women."

To his astonishment, she flashed out in such a swift, vibrant anger that he was actually silenced by the sheer force of it.

"How dare you! He wasn't working me at all. He was absolutely frank! And there wasn't a thing wrong, either. He wanted a good friend, and we talked honestly about it, and of course I liked to know a real rajah! He's just a little brown man, when you come down to it, and— Oh, you needn't laugh at me! I shan't speak to you again—not once."

She was gone, and Doyle, looking after her, was struck anew with the beauty of her lithe gait. Yes, it came again to him now in the sunset—perhaps it was because her anger, her stirred energy, was all in the set of her head and the gliding poise of her step. Then she vanished, and Doyle turned to the rail and stared out at the sunset.

"My Lord!" he exclaimed softly. "Talk about greenhorns, griffins, tenderfeet! Mutamid played his game like the crafty devil he is—and she fell for it. She's so absolutely frank and honest that she just doesn't know, can't see, is unable to imagine. By George, I begin to realize now why the old chap got me aboard. What would happen to her would—"

His eyes darkened; this talk with Ellen Harper had opened his vision to many things, had given him perception into the matter. He could see now how the claws of worry were gripped into Captain Harper's very soul. This girl, with her appalling ignorance, with her sincerity and passionate independence, was destined in the ordinary course of human affairs to suffer; but if she were victimized by Rajah Mutamid, she would inevitably be wrecked and shattered.

"Ugly business, it'd be," thought Doyle angrily. "And the government would do nothing, except maybe too late to help her.

These birds know they can do about as they damned please and get away with it —raise hell in Paris and London, bring white women out here and marry the poor fools—and the government swallows it. Hasn't any choice, for reasons of policy— Damn policy and governments! This part o' the world needs Napoleons, despots, men who pitch everything overboard except their own strong wills to rule. Fear of the law has ruined many a life— hm! There's an idea in that, for a fact."

He stared out at the scarlet stained waters. All brown men aboard, except for an old chief engineer, half addled; men who had probably been shipped in Singapore. And Rajah Mutamid had been in Singapore these many weeks. What would happen at Kuala Lembang? Doyle had no illusions whatever regarding the aspirations and sincerity of Mutamid, and he knew from sad experience that there was no law except the law of Allah at Lembang, where the rajah and his bodyguard of thirty men were all supreme.

A heavy step, and Captain Harper loomed up at the rail.

"Evening, Mr. Doyle. So you've had a talk with Ellen, have you?"

"More or less." Doyle grinned. "I begin to appreciate your troubles. Why don't you skip Kuala Lembang?"

"Impossible, sir," said Harper, his beard blowing about his chest. "My duty —and my orders; not to be thought of for a moment, sir. With you aboard, I hardly think there's any actual danger. It's only in case things go wrong with me."

"They'll not," said Doyle confidently. "You'll see. When you pull out of the river I'll be waving you goodby from that old stone wharf among the mangroves."

"Hope so," said Captain Harper, without conviction.

When Doyle met the chief, Macartney, at mess, he realized that the skipper had spoken only too truly. The man was a senile wreck, a perfect embodiment of the Greek poet's old man metaphor—a dream left wandering in the day. Petting and tinkering with his beloved engines, Macartney was still good. Away from them, he was less than nothing. No help there, in case of need.

Doyle was rather amused and a trifle irritated to discover how real was Ellen Harper's anger. She ignored him completely, except for very formal politeness, and the old skipper chuckled hugely at her manner. The other officers were all Eurasian Malays, and in this point—aboard a Chinese owned ship—Doyle readily perceived more than a coincidence.

Further, he could see why Ellen Harper might easily fascinate Rajah Mutamid or any one else. She was not so very young and she was not so very innocent; but she was used to clean minded Englishmen and was absolutely incapable of comprehending the ways and men of the brown Orient. Her education in such matters would, very probably, be a great source of amusement to Mutamid—who was cruel enough after the way of his people.

With the next morning the *Ming Wang* was wallowing along in the teeth of a strong headgale, barely making her seven knots and thankful every time her bow plates lifted unshattered from the seas.

And Ellen Harper kept her word. Speak to Doyle she would not, except in the most formal fashion. Whereat Mr. Doyle jested with the skipper and the girl's clear eyes would flash; it was no matter for jesting, as Doyle soon enough perceived. She was really hurt, really angry; and when he spoke to her seriously, endeavoring to mend things, he encountered only a hard and uncompromising silence.

Doyle began to be worried more than he would confess, for the more he saw of Ellen Harper, the more glad he was that he was aboard this ship.

III

KUALA LEMBANG opened out— the yellow throat of the Lembang river, studded with islets, masked by trees and curly mangrove roots, looking more like marsh and lake than river mouth. Yet there was a channel inside the bar, and a channel that had been used by ships and *praus* and Chinese junks

back through the ages, and by unknown craft sailed by men of the lost Khmer people, as the massive stone wharves testified, and the massive, tree covered ruins of the Khmer city on the lower ground to the left.

To the right lay Lembang, the town of today. It was not so much of a town by modern Malay standards, where two generations of white rule have left such matters sharply defined. There were no police and consequently no barracks, no telegraph office, and the postoffice was only marked off from the other thatched buildings by having a sign in front and a sleek *babu* behind the grille.

Close to the old stone wharf, where the channel was still deep enough for coasters, were the rajah's godowns. Along the river edge, elsewhere, straggled houses in native style—with a maze of boats, diving rafts and net reels everywhere around and between. Under the trees the houses ran back to where a filthy mosque gave the lie to Moslem cleanliness, and a road from the godowns slid past the Chinese bazars to the rajah's palace on the higher ground behind the village.

Rajah Mutamid's father had torn away the old stockade and enlarged the palace grounds, putting in gardens and adding buildings. Mutamid had turned the stables into a garage for his Sunbeam cars, surrounding the whole with a low wall and ornamental iron gates which always stood open unless he was away from home. The old palace, however, he retained exactly as he had inherited it—a rambling building with the women's quarters at one side, the hall of audience and the rest of the place being a separate entity under the same roof. Mutamid had put in a billiard room, and his treasures were kept in a modern wall safe in his library, for he was an extremely practical person when it came to money. Aside from this he had not altered the house of his fathers.

The *Ming Wang* came off Kuala Lembang during the night, and stood out from the treacherous coast until daylight, then chugged in and crossed the bar at high tide. The morning was well advanced when she wheezed and puttered along to the stone wharf—just as good, with as deep a channel in beside it, as when it was built in forgotten ages. A crowd of Malays greeted her, lines were made fast —and authority appeared.

The *babu* postmaster was also port doctor, representative of the rajah, and innumerable other things. He was a portly, sleek gentleman, with gold spectacles and an umbrella, a degree from Calcutta University, fluent English, an incredible thirst, and firm but cautious inclinations toward all the *cumshaw* obtainable. The Malays despised him heartily, in common with all infidels; the traders spat at his name but paid his graft; the rajah usually followed his advice. Mr. Lal Chukerjee was, in effect, cock of the walk in Kuala Lembang, but was far too wise to admit it publicly.

Pompous and alone, Chukerjee walked up the gangplank, shook hands with Captain Harper, folded his umbrella and went below for a drink and a conference. Neither Doyle nor Ellen were present—the one was seated in the stern, smoking and contemplating possible business with Rajah Mutamid, the other was writing letters in her own cabin.

It was a hot day, very damp here on the river, but the heat did not cause Chukerjee to remove his black garments. Captain Harper, on the contrary, was garbed principally in his pajamas and beard, and hot at that. When the *babu* had finished smacking his lips, the papers were gone over, leisurely enough, while the electric fan whirred and Harper poured another drink. Finally Chukerjee announced that everything was satisfactory and rose, mouthing the cigar Harper had given him.

"Now I shall have to examine your crew," he stated in his pompous manner. "We have most stringent orders, due to the recent outbreak of bubonic at Singapore, to neglect no landing on pain of very heavy penalties. I have no doubt, sir, that your men are in good shape."

"Never better," growled Harper, who was impatient of *babus* in general. "I'll

have 'em lined up and you can look 'em over."

"Very good, sir, and I thank you for your hospitality," said Mr. Chukerjee.

They went out on deck, and Harper let out a roar for his first officer, and within two minutes discovered that all his crew except one man, who was sleeping off ten pipes of opium, had deserted ship and gone ashore. The Malays there had vanished also. The officers knew nothing about it. No one knew anything about it. The steward, who had remained, was sent up to the town and brought back word that none of the crew seemed to be there.

At this report Captain Harper was furious. He stood with Chukerjee on the forward deck, the officers gathered to one side, discussing the matter. Ellen Harper, who had heard the commotion, stood by the starboard ladder, looking down at the well deck as the steward came in response to her gesture, and informed her of the matter. Doyle strolled up, heard what was said, and the girl half turned to him impulsively; then, meeting his quizzical look, she compressed her lips and descended to the deck below and joined her uncle.

Doyle looked down and scrutinized the officers, Eurasian and Malay. His eyes narrowed as he observed them, saw their looks darting sidelong at the skipper and Chukerjee, saw old Macartney fuming and pottering around in senile rage—his black gang had vanished, too, under the very eyes of the second engineer. Then, turning, Doyle saw the steward lingering near the ladder and beckoned him.

"You are not a Malay, Hong?" he asked. The steward was a hard, wide shouldered little man, his skin yellowish brown in hue, and he grinned cheerfully at Doyle.

"No, sar," he replied, for he spoke excellent English. "Chinese. From Batavia."

"Oh!" said Doyle thoughtfully.

He knew very well that your Malay regards the Chinese as an infidel and a thoroughly despicable animal, to be killed whenever a knife might be safely drawn; and that the yellow man more than repays the genial feeling. And, looking at the sturdy little Hong for almost the first time, Doyle saw things he had not previously observed in the man.

"You shipped at Hongkong?"

"Yes, sar," returned Hong.

"Hm! That's why you took the name of Hong, eh? What are you wanted for?"

The oblique eyes opened wide for an instant; the yellow jaw dropped. Doyle chuckled.

"Come on, boy, tell the truth! I'm no policeman. Be a gambler—you ought to be a good one, with your blood! You might make something out of this. What are you wanted for?"

Hong eyed him, weighed his words, then suddenly grinned again.

"A mistake, sar."

"Eh?" Doyle frowned a little. "A mistake?"

"Yes, sar. There was a Sikh in Canton, one Lal Singh, who took my woman. I went to his place and killed him, but I made the mistake of not killing the woman too. She told about it, and I came to Hongkong and shipped on this boat."

"Oh!" said Doyle. "A Sikh, eh? Glory be! If you're the lad to take on one of those descendants of the Lion, then you're the man for me. Good gambler too, eh?"

"Good gambler, sar," said Hong, and grinned again. Doyle clapped him on the shoulder.

"All right. Know anything about these men disappearing?"

Hong did not; very evidently knew nothing and had found out nothing.

"Then keep your eye on me today," said Doyle. "If I'm not mistaken, my lad, you and I are going to have some fun right here in this palatial city—and you keep your knife sharp. You haven't a gun?"

Hong had not, of course; any native who gets aboard ship or into port with a gun, in the Far East, must be a second Houdini. Doyle nodded, then turned as Harper called to him from the opposite ladder.

"Oh, Doyle! Come along to the cabin, will you?"

They gathered in the cabin—Harper, his first officer, Ellen, the suave Chukerjee, and Mr. Doyle, whom the *babu* eyed without love but with discretion.

"Now, Chukerjee, you'll come down to business, if you please," said the skipper. "You can't mean what you said—"

"Your humble pardon, sir," said Chukerjee, mopping his brow with a white silk handkerchief and trying to look very deferential, "but I am compelled to emergency, Captain. Orders are most stringent against any landing without inspection. I shall suffer most heavily in reputation and salary, perhaps with dismissal. I can not allow your ship to unload or to leave port until I have communicated with the authorities at Penang and received instructions."

"The devil you can't!" said Captain Harper, swelling with anger. "This is a damned outrage! I'll see that you pay heavily for it, too, if you tie this ship up here. You black dog, I'll—"

Chukerjee drew himself up with dignity.

"Very sorry, sir, but orders are orders. I have communication for you from Rajah Mutamid, sir. He has the honor to invite you and Miss Harper to visit his palace and stop with him while your ship is in port; he will be pleased to entertain you. I trust, sir, you will find this hospitality will remove the sting of the occasion from your mind. In a day or so I will receive instructions, for the post is very effective, sir, under my management."

"I'll be—"

Captain Harper's furious beginning came to an abrupt pause. His niece touched his arm and her voice checked his outburst in its inception.

"By all means, Uncle," she said calmly, "let's accept this invitation. It's very silly to get angry over nothing; in fact, it's silly to get angry at all."

"Oh, is it?" put in Doyle dryly. She flashed him a look and flushed slightly.

"Yes, it is. Uncle, there's no use whatever in not being sensible about it. Perhaps Mr. Doyle would like to go with us. I'm sure he'd be quite welcome."

Chukerjee bowed his portly figure a trifle.

"I am very sorry, miss," he said, "but my instructions are precise. There was no mention of Mr. Doyle. Is he one of the ship's officers? I did not see his name on the list. And this ship, I think, has no license to carry passengers."

Sleek Chukerjee was, from a technical standpoint, entirely master of the situation, and knew it very well. Unfortunately for himself, he did not know Mr. Doyle very well.

"Now, Cap'n," said Doyle quietly, his voice driving through the silence and bringing every eye to his very cheerful countenance, "this is a very simple little game. Your crew's ashore. You can't stir a hand until you get 'em back—and you won't get 'em back until they get their orders to come back. Not from you, either. You're in bad all around. You've walked right into the web, and it's caught you so you can't move. However, I can—not being one of your ship's officers. You let me cut this Gordian knot, and I'll cut it in two shakes. Agreed?"

"Hm! Yes, of course," said the skipper, pawing at his beard. Doyle looked at the girl.

"Mutamid invites you up to the house. Are you set on going? Speak up."

"Of course we're going," she returned, with a defiant gaze. Doyle shrugged.

"All right." He turned to Chukerjee. "Now, my sleek *babu*, you hear? They're going. They will very gladly visit Rajah Mutamid when a conveyance is sent for them. Understand?"

"Yes, sir, of course," said Chukerjee, looking a trifle worried. "I regret keenly, sir, that you are not asked to accompany—"

"Never mind that," broke in Doyle crisply. "If I want to see Mutamid, I'll go along and see him. Now, let me tell you that there's no *cumshaw* in this business for you. Not a cent. You've come aboard here and the whole Malay gang ashore is waiting to see you strut off, so you can commence to strut here and now."

Doyle's right hand affectionately

gripped the lapels of Chukerjee's black coat.

It is a remarkable fact, as policemen and others have learned in this wicked world, that the civilized man is nearly helpless when caught without his shoes, and altogether helpless when he is properly shaken. There is quite a knack—more, indeed, than you would suppose—about shaking a man with one hand, particularly a bulky man, but Doyle had been at great pains to learn this knack with exceeding great precision.

Chukerjee moved forward and backward on his toes, uttering strange noises as his head was jerked now one way, now another. His arms waved madly but aimlessly in the air. He was backed out of the cabin, his umbrella clutched tightly, then Doyle released his grip. The *babu* turned and fled for the deck.

Doyle followed him, gained the forward deck and came up with him just as he was making for the gangplank. This time he took Chukerjee by the coat collar and kicked him—hard, very hard. A good deal of confusion was going on all around, but Doyle was oblivious to it. When he was quite through kicking, he let his victim go bleating down the gangplank, with umbrella and spectacles and hat rolling by the way. Not a soul was in sight ashore, but as Chukerjee—to whom all the village owed money—fled ingloriously out of sight, very strange sounds came from the trees and thatched roofs and the brush. Whoever says that Malays do not laugh is ignorant.

"Good Lord, you mustn't do that!" gasped out the skipper, seizing Doyle by the arm. "Why didn't you tell me what you meant to do? Why the devil wouldn't you listen—"

Doyle chuckled.

"All finished, Cap'n," he said cheerfully. "You have to put that sort of a grafter in his place. I expect Mutamid will send down his car for you right after tiffin—he has a state Sunbeam, specially built in England—so you'd better do your packing now."

Harper stared at him, eyes wide, beard ruffled.

"Packing? What for? Think I need to pack to go ashore for a visit?"

Doyle shrugged lightly and turned away.

"Maybe not," he flung over his shoulder. "Maybe not. But you'd better pack a gun, anyhow."

IV

SURE enough, a gorgeous Sunbeam came rolling down the road from the palace to the godowns, and halted on the stone wharf—a car that glinted with silver and polish, a gloriously attired footman seated beside the chauffeur. It was empty—the rajah sent for his guests, and did not go to meet them. After all, he was a rajah.

Doyle watched Ellen and the skipper get in without any luggage and be driven off. He was inwardly more than a little astonished when they appeared; but a look at Captain Harper told him more than any words could have told. Of course, Ellen wanted to visit the palace, if only to prove to Doyle that she took no orders from him; but she could not have prevailed over the anxiety of Harper, normally. Now, it was another matter altogether. The lion-like look of the bluff old seaman was gone, the face was gray, the faded hard eyes were hesitant and uncertain.

"Devilish clever of Mutamid; or else, more likely, plain luck for him," meditated Mr. Doyle, as he leaned on the rail in the afternoon sunlight. "At sea, old Harper is supreme, the literal master, entirely confident in himself and his authority. Tangled up with port authorities it's another thing altogether. All he wants now, most desperately, is to get off to sea again, out of this stinking hole. He thinks that if he can handle Mutamid properly he'll get the red tape and get unloaded and off, maybe. Also, he's sick; he's had a bad spell, or I'm a Dutchman! That's luck for Mutamid. He wouldn't know about Harper's bad heart, of course. Hm! Begins to look as though the old chap did a good job when he fetched Jimmy Doyle

along this trip. Wonder if I can go ashore?"

Just to test out the matter he leisurely strolled down the plank to the wharf. It was quite deserted, though now the Malay houses up and down the river bank were teeming with life as usual, women and children splashing among the boats and diving rafts. As Doyle reached the blistering hot stones two gentlemen appeared without ostentation—two Malay gentlemen, armed with *kris* and rifle. One of them motioned to him significantly. Doyle waved his hand and negligently turned, retracing his steps. Hong was standing by the rail, watching him with a sardonic expression on his yellow-brown face.

"To my cabin in half an hour," said Doyle, and passed on.

Alone, he sat down, smoked and considered the situation. Something was afoot, but nothing very raw—something silky, suave, genteel. Mutamid was nobody's fool. Doyle was not wanted in the affair. Two men of the bodyguard were watching lest he get ashore. Thirty of them in all, small brown men who knew how to kill and who loved to kill, poor shots with rifles but deadly with the flame bladed *kris*. Above them, the flat faced rajah, with his Oxford education and his cruel coward's heart; behind him the wily Lal Chukerjee, adept at all things, chiefly at financial gain.

"I don't know just what happened at Singapore," mused Doyle, "but Mutamid arranged it neatly; perhaps bought off the hooker's crew, handling it through some influential Chinese or a seamen's union. Replaced the lot with his own men. Chukerjee saw a chance for graft and fixed things up at this end. So far as the *Ming Wang* is concerned, we're a total loss; her owners will have to square up somehow, unless Harper makes a deal with the rajah. And when he comes to the point and learns what the deal is, he'll lose his head. Looks pretty nasty all around. That fat Bengali sits back and pulls the strings. Needs money, too—there's been no money in rubber these two years."

Doyle frowned as he smoked. His previous experience with Rajah Mutamid had not been at all pleasant. Anywhere else, it would have been plain robbery, combined with blackmail. Doyle had wiped off the slate temporarily—until some opportunity for evening the score presented itself; and now the opportunity was come.

It must be confessed without any qualms or false notions of right and wrong that James Doyle, Esq, had singularly slight respect for the blindness of justice; to put it another way, his ideas of law were highly individual. Like most men who stand out in any way from the general mass, his code of ethics was not an acceptance of somebody's else code, but was all his own; and he adhered to it. If he wanted to do a thing he did not look around for excuses and pretexts to salve his conscience, but went ahead and did it. Sometimes his actions needed justification badly; sometimes, in the eyes of other people, they would have been downright crimes; none the less, if he felt justified in his own eyes, Mr. Doyle gave not a hang for other people but went serenely ahead. He was, in a word, very human and pleasingly independent about it.

Hong showed up, closed the door and stood looking fixedly at Doyle.

"Well, my lad, things are looking up a bit for piracy," said Doyle cheerfully. "I want to go ashore tonight and take a look-see over the palace."

"Can do, sar," said Hong, and grinned.

"The deuce you say! Without any noise?"

"Yes, sar; very simple. You be ready eight o'clock, I come for you."

"Hm! Mutamid will be at dinner about then, or a bit later; fine! Go ahead, magician."

Hong grinned, saluted and took his departure. Doyle decided that he liked Hong better than ever.

The remainder of the day dragged heavily. Doyle was not unacquainted with Malay ways, and had no difficulty in guessing about what would be taking place ashore. There would be a trip over the plantations, a review of the body-

guard, a hall of audience and so forth to kill the afternoon; then a grand dinner, and after the dinner a business talk.

"My proposition won't be worth a tinker's dam if it doesn't go through straight and hard and quick," he reflected. "If Ellen had her eyes open to things, it'd be simple. If she was all alone, it'd be simple. Harper just couldn't abandon his ship, naturally; we may work it for him to stick with the ship, while I take Ellen over to Penang or somewhere. Ten miles of good roadwork, and we'd be out of Mutamid's territory anyhow. Hm! Mutamid ought to pay heavily for being such a nuisance and making me work, not to mention the worry he's caused poor old Harper. I don't see why he shouldn't pay a bit, too."

An attractive thought, which grew upon mature reflection. Doyle did not ask whether his suspicions of the rajah were correct; he knew they were correct.

What he wanted, and wanted badly, was a gun. Along toward mess time he did his best to get hold of one, but had no luck whatever. Harper had locked up his cabin, and Macartney when approached on the subject, told Mr. Doyle to go to hell and mind his own affairs, and went back to his spanner and waste, mumbling. Doyle consoled himself with the observation that there would be guns enough in the palace for the taking, provided he got inside.

HE MESSED with the Eurasian gentlemen, and it was an unpleasant meal, for they were all very cheerful, and Doyle felt they were cheerful at his expense, which he did not like. Afterward he went to his own cabin, which was hot and moist and disagreeable; even his cigarets were so damp they did not smoke well. All in all, Mr. James Doyle was in a highly unpleasant and irritable frame of mind, which might partly explain, if not excuse, his subsequent actions. Also, he knew that if he did accomplish anything, he must gamble pretty heavily on Rajah Mutamid's taking a drop too much at dinner and opening the eyes of Ellen Harper. Any action on Doyle's part would certainly have to be swift.

He had no map, but he knew that Penang, on the west coast of the peninsula, could be reached. It was only a hundred and thirty miles distant—he had walked most of the way at the time of his previous visit to Kuala Lembang, thanks to the rajah. There ought, in strict justice, to be a bit of payment for that walk also, he reflected.

A knock at the door—eight o'clock to the minute—and Hong entered with his usual grin.

"Ready, sar?"

"You bet." Doyle took up his helmet, then discarded it as a useless encumbrance at night, and a dead giveaway—the white blotch could be seen at a distance, and marked him for what he was. "No gun? Neither have I, and I want to get one. Lead the way, my lad. I don't know how you expect to get ashore, but I'm with you."

Hong led the way to the deserted after well deck. They encountered no one—all the officers except Macartney were busy at a card game. The moon was not yet up, and the deck lights were not on; it was undeniably dark.

"Wrong side, my lad," said Doyle. "The wharf's on the other side."

Then with a chuckle, he halted. Hong was at the rail, holding up a two-inch rope which ran over the side; peering down, Doyle made out the dim shape of a native boat there, empty. He liked this, liked Hong more and more. No questions as to whether he could go down a rope or not; merely the rope and the boat and the grin.

"You'll do, Hong," he observed. "We'll get on together. I can use a lad like you in my business."

"Can do, sar," came the soft voice.

Doyle went down the rope. He knew Hong must have slipped overboard after dark and stolen the boat—and when any one can steal a boat from a line of Malay craft, with the Malays close at hand, he is an accomplished person. It was a little craft with two paddles, but quite sufficient for the purpose.

Hong came down, caught a paddle, threw off the line and crouched in the bow. No words were exchanged; Doyle knew exactly what the scheme was. In another minute they were out in the channel and creeping upstream past the wharf and the houses above. Past these, Doyle headed in for the bank, and they came to land amid a twisted huddle of stinking mangrove roots, for the tide was going out. Hong carefully tied the boat, in case of need, then struck out, leading the way among the trees until they reached a field —a rice paddy. Skirting this, the two men presently gained the road, fifty yards from the palace itself.

Doyle reconnoitered, knowing his way about the place from here on. He could see the figure at the open gates in the low wall—a sentry, negligently smoking, rifle laid aside. Lights glittered in the palace itself, but faintly; the gardens, dark and somber under the stars, cloaked the buildings behind. When Doyle turned to Hong, the latter had vanished from sight.

"What's the little devil up to?" thought Doyle, worried.

Then he swung around, hearing a slight sound across the night. Where the figure of the sentry had been was a queer formless blotch against the white wall. Presently this straightened up, and, without hesitation, Doyle marched forward.

The sentry came to meet him. It was Hong, wearing the high peaked green turban, frogged jacket and *sarong* affected by the rajah's bodyguard. Against the wall lay something dark.

"Knife?" asked Doyle.

"No, sar," returned Hong. "But he will make no noise until he is set free. I do not like a knife, sar, after the mistake I made in Canton."

Doyle chuckled to himself. Here was a man after his own heart. Hong asked no questions, needed no orders, knew very well that Doyle could do better alone than with any one else—and was running obvious risks in assuming his present rôle.

"All right, my lad," said Doyle. "You and I understand each other. If you get into any jam, fire that rifle and then duck for it. Make the ship. I'm not coming back."

"Yes, sar. I go too, sar."

"You little devil! Mean to say you've read my mind?"

"No, sar—" And Hong's teeth flashed in the starlight. "I go with you, sar."

This caused a warm happiness in Doyle's heart. He knew that from the moment he came aboard, Hong must have been appraising him, studying him, making up his mind toward this very moment. Hong had simply picked him as a man to remain with, that was all; and few men but respond with a queer warmth to such a thing.

"Can you run a car, Hong?"

"Yes, sar!" This came proudly. "I was chauffeur in Batavia to French consul."

"Huh! Why did you lose your job?"

"Very bad mistake, sar."

"The hell you say!" Doyle laughed softly. "All right. If there's any rumpus in the house, make for the garage—the old stables, over there to the left. Mutamid has three or four Sunbeams. Pick one and run it out here."

"Yes, sar."

"You'll do it, too," thought Doyle, as he turned in at the gate and slipped over to the side of the drive, under cover of the trees. "And heaven help anybody who tries to stop you at it! Hong, you're a jewel above price!"

And the stars winked knowingly at him as he approached the palace of Rajah Mutamid.

V

EVEN a portly, crafty and entirely unscrupulous Bengali *babu* can make mistakes; and Lal Chukerjee, B. A., had made a grievous mistake this day—quite unwittingly—in not shaking the dust of Kuala Lembang from his feet and departing elsewhere. It was not to be expected that he would do such a thing, of course, and herein might lie some fitting talk of Karma or Kismet or the destiny that shapes our ends.

Instead of departing, therefore, Chukerjee went on this particular evening to the palace, where normally he had no business at night. He went by royal command, since Rajah Mutamid desired speech with him in a certain matter of pleasure and profit. At the hall of audience, held during the afternoon as a spectacle for Captain Harper and his niece, complaint had been made that Chukerjee, in his capacity of money lender, had taken unto himself a wife and a necklace of very fine matched pearls belonging to a Chinese trader at a village up the coast. The complaint was unfortunate all around. The Chinese would not live to see the outcome, and Chukerjee must now sell at not too great profit; and the wife who had brought him the pearls would certainly need attention with a whip for not having poisoned her husband as she claimed had been done.

So Lal Chukerjee came to the palace with a silk roll in his waistcoat pocket and waited in the library while the rajah dined with his guests.

A pleasant room, the library, for Mutamid spent much time here. With delicate disregard of Mohammedan prejudice, the ingrain carpet was of bright green, and large framed photographs reminiscent of Mutamid's experiences in Paris adorned the walls; it is to be feared that the late Mr. Comstock would have been distinctly uneasy in the presence of these pictures—of one particularly; a little blonde. . . . A long center table bore English magazines and books, overstuffed chairs, smoking tabouret and a large silver adorned tantalus added comfort to the scene, and on the north wall was hung a handsome panel of Chinese embroidered silk, which completely masked the wall safe containing the state treasures. The entire west wall was set with wide French doors opening on the shaded terrace and the gardens.

Mr. Chukerjee, while waiting, hopefully investigated the silk panel but found the safe closed as usual. So he helped himself to a cigaret and tried to decide just how much might be asked for the necklace of pearls. And, growing tired of waiting, he opened the tantalus and poured a large drink by the most direct method—without any needless use of a glass.

Mutamid came in at last, and Chukerjee observed with approval that he was most elegantly attired in evening dress, wearing his finest black pearls and the collar of the obscure Dutch decoration bestowed upon him at the time a Dutch colonial official owed him some money. Mutamid was not handsome. His features were flat and slovenly, his mouth was loose and his eyes were cruel; but he bore himself well, as he should with all the training of a gentleman, and he possessed a certain personality, and a *savoir faire*, which bore him in good stead—as long as the veneer remained uncracked. Underneath, of course, he was plain Malay, being of pure and unblemished stock.

"Good evening, Chukerjee; good evening," he said affably, taking up a cheroot. "So you got my message, eh?"

"Yes, your Highness," returned the *babu*, bowing as well as he could manage it. "I trust your Highness is in good health this evening?"

"Never better; never better, my lad." Mutamid grinned a little as he lighted his weed. "Come, I've not too much time; did you bring that necklace? I'd like to see it."

"An order is an order, your Highness," said Chukerjee.

He produced the roll of silk from his pocket and spread it open on the table. A necklace of pearls was revealed—neither a large necklace, nor large pearls. At first glance, it was rather disappointing, but Chukerjee held his peace, for he knew very well that Mutamid was a thorough expert in such matters. Words were needless.

Mutamid picked up the necklace, and from the desk he took a jeweler's glass, which he stuck in his eye. Examination showed that in nearly every instance the pearls were flawless, perfectly round, of matched size and of remarkable luster. The necklace, in fact, was worth perhaps a hundred times as much as a casual viewer would suppose.

"So," observed the rajah, and put down his glass again. "Your price?"

"Your Highness," said the *babu*, "were I not what I am, a poor man, it would give me the most unbounded happiness to place these gewgaws in the hand of your Highness as a slight testimonial of my esteem—"

"Tut, tut," said Mutamid impatiently. "I told you I have very little time; more important affairs are waiting. We can not discuss price tonight except on a yes-or-no basis. Name your final price. If it is too high, the matter is ended. If fair, I'll pay you on the nail. Your answer?"

Chukerjee debated an instant with himself. He knew that Mutamid wanted these pearls here and now, for some whim which he could guess accurately enough. He knew that to name too high a price would be ruinous to him personally. Therefore, a flash of sheer inspiration came to him.

"Your Highness, on this head I can not say," he responded. "I am no merchant in jewels. I can not set a fair price. As your Highness knows, I have for some time coveted that ancient neckpiece of sapphires and crystal which is in your treasury, even to the point of buying same at exorbitant figure; however, it is in my mind that these pearls are very fine. I shall place them in the hand of your Highness. They are yours. If it is the pleasure of your Highness to set a price upon them, I shall accept it humbly. It is not for me, who am the dust beneath the feet of your Highness, to set a price. Does the servant thus reward the bounty of his master? No! The pearls are yours. Do as you desire, Rajah Mutamid."

This was shrewd, and doubly shrewd. When duly flattered, Mutamid was wont to have a generous streak uppermost—he was too Oriental in his blood to be otherwise. And he held the jewel of which Chukerjee had spoken rather cheaply. He did not know, like the *babu*, that the crystal was a marvel of old Chinese art, the sapphires very pure despite their small size.

"Very well," said Mutamid, probing the Bengali for an instant with his eyes.

He went to the hanging silk panel and pushed it lightly aside on its rings, so that the face of a very antique wall safe was exposed. For a moment he manipulated the knob of this, until the door swung open, revealing two rows of little drawers, small and large. One of these he drew forth and laid on the table. He slid out another and opened an envelope, from which he produced some extremely pretty black and white paper. Rajah Mutamid distrusted most financial institutions, and it was his habit to keep on hand a very large sum in Bank of England notes; nothing could be more useful in the event of an emergency. He replaced the second drawer and envelope, closed the safe again and turned to the drawer laying on the table. This he opened with a key from his pocket and, fumbling among the little boxes it contained, he drew forth an old, flat case covered with faded brocade, and turned to the Bengali.

"Here, Chukerjee," he said, "is the neckpiece you desire. And here is five hundred pounds in cash. As for the pearls, I accept them. They are mine. Are you satisfied?"

Lal Chukerjee was satisfied—at best, he had expected an even swap. And, considering that the pearls had cost him nothing except food for an extra wife, he had not done so badly in the matter, either.

"The bounty of your Highness is as the rain of heaven—"

"Allah upon you!" Mutamid laughed a little, fingering the soft pearls in his hand and regarding the portly man. "Listen to me, infidel. When this captain of a ship—this Harper—comes to you in the morning and demands liberty to unload and clear, and wants his crew, give him all. That is to say, provided he bears a note from me. Otherwise, use excuses."

"I am legally constituted port authority of Kuala Lembang, your Highness," said Chukerjee, pompously. "It shall be done as per the instructions of your Highness."

"Then clear out," said Mutamid curtly. "Here, go this way," and he pointed to the open French window giving upon the terrace.

"Pardon—one thing, your Highness," said Chukerjee, pausing. "That man aboard the ship—the man Doyle! He insulted me most grievously today. He assaulted me, and in me the person of your Highness, whom I represent. He shook me and he kicked me."

Mutamid grinned. Perhaps he would have liked to do the same thing to Chukerjee.

"Never mind," he said. "I know this man Doyle, and he knows me. I've ordered that he be kept aboard the ship. We'll make them pay up for this assault, never fear! Tomorrow we can have the papers made out, let him come ashore, and arrest him. I've no authority as long as he stays on the ship—but he'll not stay, once we permit him to land."

Glee overspread the dark features of Mr. Chukerjee.

"May God reward your Highness—"

"Will you clear out?" said the rajah nervously.

Chukerjee cleared out, clasping the brocade covered box to his bosom.

HARD upon his departure, Captain Harper and his niece came into the library, ushered in by the Malay butler in resplendent white and scarlet. Mutamid greeted them courteously, made the butler a sign to remain, then regarded the girl with a half smile.

"Miss Harper," he said gently, "perhaps you know that it is the custom for a guest of honor to receive a souvenir—a little present, to keep in memory of the occasion. Its value depends wholly upon the wealth of the host and upon the esteem in which he holds the guest. Therefore, I am sure that Captain Harper will permit me to present you with a very slight token of my esteem, that you may remember your visit to Kuala Lembang with pleasure."

And not without a certain grace he placed the little roll of silk in the hand of the girl. Captain Harper, who was chewing on a long and very splendid whitish Dutch cheroot, frowned but did not intervene as Ellen pushed aside the silk and revealed the pearls. To him, doubtless, they did not look so much.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in a hushed voice.

Whether she knew pearls or not, she was a woman and therefore was possessed of a certain sense about such things. She looked at the pearls, felt them in her fingers, then lifted starry eyes.

"Oh! You mustn't give me such things—this must be valuable!" she exclaimed.

Rajah Mutamid smiled.

"A few little pearls? Nonsense. I have quantities of them, I assure you. They lose their life in my safe; worn on your throat, they will take on fresh life and give you new pleasure all the time. And now, if you like, Kulop will escort you to see the women's part of the palace—I believe the ladies of my household have been expecting you eagerly. Visits of outsiders are rare, you know, and are eagerly anticipated. Unfortunately, it would not be considered proper for me to escort you myself—and probably you would be more at ease with only women around. Kulop understands English and you'll find him entirely at your command."

"Not a bad idea, my dear," said Captain Harper majestically. When he had taken a drop or two, particularly of champagne, he was very majestic. "Rajah Mutamid and I may talk over a bit of business while you're gone, and then we'd better be getting back to the ship."

"Yes. I can't thank you enough," said Ellen radiantly, "for these beautiful pearls! I've always wanted some real pearls, and never expected to have any. And I'll be frightfully glad to see the mysterious parts of the palace! I know you have all sorts of queer things hidden away—you remember telling me about some of them in Singapore?"

Mutamid bowed politely and motioned to the Malay.

"Then Kulop will take you across to the women's quarters, and will bring you back. On your head be her safety, Kulop! Your life is hers, and at her command, you are to obey!"

"It is an order, master, and by Allah, to be obeyed!" said Kulop, and salaamed.

Of course, neither Captain Harper nor his niece saw anything unusual in such words—although they were uttered in English. It was a very happy bit of byplay, well rehearsed and excellently carried off. Rajah Mutamid held back the door curtain for Ellen and bowed again as she passed. Then, letting fall the curtain, he turned on the switch that set the electric *punkah* in motion. Captain Harper looked up and nodded gratefully.

"Fine, fine—a bit o' breeze is just the thing a night like this!" he observed. "By the way, Rajah, about that ship of mine—"

"Time enough for that." Mutamid laughed silkily as he lighted a cigaret and sank back into his favorite chair. He shoved the open drawer from the safe across the table. "Look at some of those pretty things, sir. Might amuse you. Open the boxes."

Somewhat puzzled, Captain Harper obeyed. His fingers awkwardly opened one box after another, until he realized that he was looking at real jewels. Nothing to set the Rue de la Paix afire, perhaps, but indubitably jewels and very fine ones. They meant little to him, and of a sudden he lifted troubled eyes and pushed them away.

"Very kind of you, your Highness—but I'm worried about things. My ship, for one, and my crew. I can't understand it. Those lascars slipped ashore and disappeared. I must break out my cargo and—"

Rajah Mutamid waved his cigaret negligently.

"All very simple, Captain Harper; very simple. I'll give you a note to that rascal Chukerjee and he'll attend to things. By the way, one of my aunts—I have three, you know—is quite insistent that your niece spend a day or two here in the palace. She's been to England and is rather eager to have a little time with an Englishwoman—talking clothes and such things. Perhaps Miss Ellen will find the visit agreeable, too, until time for you to sail."

"Eh?" said Harper, fingering his cheroot. "Why, that's very good of you. I'll ask her about it when she comes in. I rather fancy she'd sooner stop aboard, if it's just the same to you. She might run up after breakfast, you know."

Captain Harper, who on first meeting was a real viking, a lion of the seas, was quite a different sort of person when taken out of his own environment; and this would appear to be a usual attribute of sailormen in general. Few of them survive transplanting, even for an hour.

Rajah Mutamid surveyed his guest, reflective, narrow eyed, a trifle contemptuous. Perhaps he saw this man as a simple child, helpless against a crafty brain. At all events, he rose and opened the silver mouthed tantalus and poured two liqueurs, one of which he brought over to Harper.

"We'll see about it tomorrow," he said. "How!"

"Right," said Harper, and drained the little glass, then coughed. Suddenly, catching the oddity of the words, he looked up. "Eh? See about it tomorrow? What d'you mean?"

"Just that." Mutamid smiled at him softly, silkily, purring his words. "These jewels—they are for her to wear. She'll be well taken care of, will have a nice visit. You'll be a day or two getting unloaded and cleared. No use bothering her."

"I don't get your drift, sir," said Harper, sitting up straight in his chair. "I don't like your tone by half, Rajah. Perhaps you'd better send for her—"

"Nonsense, nonsense!" Mutamid laughed. "She's not coming back here."

"Eh?" Captain Harper stood up, stared hard at the brown man, his faded eyes glittering. A touch of heavy color came into his face. "Eh? Explain yourself!"

Mutamid carefully extinguished his cigaret, finished his cognac.

"Explain? You've heard me. I'll bring the young lady to the ship before you sail—and not until. She's here of her own free will; she's enjoying herself; she'll have a good time—"

"By the lord Harry!" burst out Captain Harper, his features purpling. "So

that's your game, is it? I knew all the while there was some skullduggery afoot! Now, you send for her and do it on the spot—hear me? If you don't, I'll go through your tin palace myself, and when the authorities get done with you—"

Mutamid laughed a little and clapped his hands. The curtains parted and six armed Malays came into the room—not servants, but fighting men, guards, green turbans twisted high into peaks above their heads.

"No, no, my dear Captain Harper," said Mutamid in his silky manner. "You see, I am not a big man like you, therefore I must have other men serve me and take care of me and mine. Shall I call a car to take you back to the wharf? Or would you prefer to walk in the moonlight?"

Captain Harper looked at the six men, and his faded eyes filled with terrible despair and futility. He saw that their hands were beneath their shining Bugi *sarongs*, each hand on a weapon. He knew that Ellen was far gone in another part of the palace, unsuspecting, around her laughing native women.

"Why not," purred the rajah, "consider these jewels that she will wear—"

"Jewels!" cried out the seaman in a tortured voice, as the veins stood out on his forehead. With one hand he struck at the safe drawer and sent it to the floor with a crash, so that little boxes and rolls of silk fell about the carpet. "Jewels! When she—she—"

He fell silent.

VI

WHEN Lal Chukerjee stepped out of the French window on to the terrace he did not make a hasty departure.

He was a careful man, and even in the instant of his going he recollected that he had not examined the contents of the little brocade box. He knew that this box held the necklet which he desired, but whether it held the jewel at this moment was another thing; Mutamid was also a careful man. It would be just as well to look into the matter, and there was no time like the present.

He moved away from the open door to one at the end of the room, where light flooded out through curtains. There he paused and opened the box. The heart within him leaped for joy as he drew out from folds of silk the thing which he craved. No Oriental heart could resist the beauty of this jewel, even when ignorant of its real value.

Upon a fine old silver chain holding six small sapphires mounted as the hearts of flowers hung as pendant a bit of quartz crystal two inches long and nearly as wide, and half an inch thick. It was clear, transparent, beautiful, the rarest gem crystal; and it was intricately carven with a *lu-wan* bird on either side. Further, one side was a rare and delicate green, the other side was clear pink—one of those natural freaks adapted by Chinese gem cutters to enhance a design with its own pattern of colors. It was certainly old, and as certainly a thing of supreme but delicate beauty. The tourist eye would pass it over; the eye of a connoisseur would fall upon it with incredulous delight.

Unfortunately for Lal Chukerjee, his delight caused him to be quite oblivious of everything around. Thus, he did not perceive that from the tenuous, high branching mass of bamboos to one side a more solid shadow had detached itself. He did become aware of a presence close beside him, and turned with a startled little bleat—but then it was too late. The edge of a hand came down across the nape of his neck; a devastating blow when it reaches the right spot.

In this case it certainly reached the spot. Chukerjee's head jerked grotesquely and he crumpled up, paralyzed momentarily. A hand caught him, swinging him aside in his fall so that he rested in the shadow at the foot of the bamboos. Mr. Doyle knelt beside him and curiously inspected his clenched hands.

"So you'll have me attended to, you swine?" murmured Mr. Doyle. "Very kind of you, I'm sure. We'll just have a look-see at what you're so interested

in. Hm! Well, I'll not rob you, at all events—"

From one clenched dark fist he retrieved a roll of banknotes, which he opened out, crumpled into a stiff ball, and shoved into the mouth of Chukerjee. The brocade box came next, and this he moved into the light.

For a long moment Doyle inspected the necklace. Much of its value was lost upon him, but not its beauty—the delicate shimmer of the crystal, the soft colors, at once struck him. What a jewel to place about the neck of Ellen Harper!

"Good!" he said to himself, as he pocketed the box. "Now we're going on something definite, James. A filthy Bengali has obviously no right to such a thing as this, which belongs on just one throat in all the world. However you came by it, you didn't get it honestly, and you must be made to pay somehow for your share in this filthy mess. So that's that."

Chukerjee being gagged with five hundred pounds sterling, his wrists were soon tied behind his back with his own gold watch chain, and his feet were bound together with his own silk handkerchief; after which, when he recovered from that blow, he would only be able to make inarticulate noises in his throat until daylight discovered him.

All this, of course, took a little time, for Doyle was one of those men who believed in thoroughness at all times, particularly in times of emergency. And, being thus occupied, Mr. Doyle did not pay any attention to what was transpiring in the library. He did not, in fact, anticipate that anything of interest would be transpiring there. He explored the person of Lal Chukerjee, and to his infinite gratification came upon a large Browning automatic, which he promptly pocketed. He was still feeling in sour and angry mood and regretted keenly the necessity of putting out the Bengali without more real punishment.

So, when at length he returned to the open French window in order to hear and see more of what was going on in the library, he was astonished to see the figure of Captain Harper lying on the floor by the table, face down. Standing looking at him, and at the scattered little boxes on the floor, were two green turbaned guards. No one else was in the room.

Doyle stiffened. Where was Mutamid? Where was Ellen? Was Harper dead or drunk? As he stood there staring in, he caught the voices of the two guards—they were only a few feet away from him and he was well versed in low Malay.

"By Allah!" said one, looking down at Harper. "Here are the jewels of the old ranee, and this infidel dead among them! How, then, did he die? There will be questions asked."

"*Apa buleh buat?*" said the other, with a shrug. "What's to be done? Nothing. He caught at his belly and died, that is all. It was the will of God, the Compassionate! See! He and the rajah drank from the same bottle. Let us put him in a chair and see what he carries, eh? The girl is gone to the women's quarters. It is safe."

The two of them bent above the body of Harper.

This little discussion showed Doyle everything. He regretted now that he had not remained here listening to what passed between Mutamid and Harper; obviously, what the old seamen feared had come to pass. And Ellen was in the women's quarters. Doyle stepped forward, opened the screen door and was in the room—a slim, fair haired man, his eyes glittering icily as he struck. He seemed a whip of flesh indeed—flesh and bone and sinew, as his arms lashed forth.

The two Malays were caught unawares, as they lifted the body of Captain Harper and placed it in a big chair. They fell away, gripping at the blades beneath their *sarongs*, for Doyle was merciless and terrible. His slender hard fists broke their bones, shattered them with blows; the three figures lashed about the room for a moment in swift convulsive efforts, too fast for eye to follow. One of the brown men struck the wall beneath the safe headlong, and his head twisted queerly under his body, and he lay motionless. The other, who had his *kris* out by this time,

fell and rolled over twice, like a cat, and plunged upward at Doyle; but the white man evaded the thrust and flung himself down on the Malay, so that the *kris* was between them, held close for a moment . . .

"Allah!" cried out the Malay, as the two bodies writhed on the floor. Then he relaxed, and he too lay quiet, for the *kris* had been forced in between his ribs, still clenched in his own hand.

Doyle rose and looked around. No alarm had been raised, evidently. He did not need to give a second glance to the two guards, but he went to the chair and touched the limp body of Captain Harper, and saw that he was dead. Then he sent his gaze around the room and considered. The little boxes on the floor caught his eye. Jewels of the ranee, had said the men. Probably the jewels of Mutamid's mother.

STOOPING, Doyle picked up three of the boxes and put them on the table and opened them. He dumped their contents forth in a heap and regarded it. Jewels, yes; filigree work, flashing stones, the soft white glow of pearls. Nothing here to compare with the pink and green crystal. He took this out of his pocket and looked at it again in the brighter light, and his heart warmed to it. Yes, this was for Ellen—must be for her alone. As for the others—

"Mutamid, you owe me something anyhow," murmured Doyle, picking up more of the little boxes and dumping out their contents. "So you might as well pay up in this fashion. I'd better take what I can get while the getting's good— Hello! Holy cats, would you look at this!"

"This" proved to be a scintillating, iridescent necklace of blood amber, interspersed with huge green chrysoberyls set in small golden plaques. Doyle happened to know about these stones, the true "cat's eye", for he had talked with a man in Batavia seeking them, vainly. He knew that a good one was worth a couple of hundred pounds and up—and here were a dozen at least, exquisite things for those who liked them. He scooped them up with the rest and filled his jacket pockets —and felt no compunction in doing so.

"Score's more or less settled, but not in full," he reflected comfortably. "Mutamid owes Ellen a pretty heavy score, seems to me. We'll divide this loot, just to settle the monetary bill; but there's more to it. And what about burying Harper, eh? No time for that. Hm! I'll have to be looking her up—"

He glanced about the room, shoulder high on three sides with panels and battens of light wood, beautifully grained. Then, with a nod, he stepped out to the terrace and took the prostrate Chukerjee by the collar and dragged him around to the far side of the bamboo clump. The Bengali groaned faintly, and Doyle chuckled.

"You'll do more than groan pretty soon, my friend—but you won't be hurt," he observed cheerily, and returned to the library.

He closed and locked the French windows, then took from the table some English magazines and newspapers and made a nice pile in one corner against the paneling. Over these he placed a light wicker chair. He helped himself to Mutamid's cigarets, poured a stiff drink and then lighted a cigaret. The flaming match he tossed into the wadded newspapers and saw them catch; then, chuckling, he pushed aside the curtain and stepped into the passage leading to the main portion of the palace.

He did not need to look back.

As he had anticipated, no one was in sight. He glanced into the billiard room in passing and found it empty. A door ahead was closed; he opened it, pushed aside a curtain and found himself looking out upon the *balai*, or hall of state.

Mutamid did not love the open air like his fathers. His audience hall was part of the palace, a large central room, with a throne instead of a mat for the rajah, and otherwise quite bare. Doors opened out on three sides, the rear wall being latticed so that the women, unseen, might observe proceedings on state occasions. Doyle saw two more of the green turbaned

guards standing talking on the other side of the hall, near a door which he guessed went to the women's wing, and which now stood open.

He quietly stepped out behind the curtain, then closed the door at his back. Something might turn up at any instant; otherwise, he must go ahead and use the pistol in his hand. Time was rapidly shortening on him, for the fire must be discovered ere long.

For perhaps five minutes—an enormously long time under suspense—Doyle stood there behind the curtain, peering forth from one side of it, waiting. He was still smoking his cigaret, deliberately, for those two guards were on the other side of the large room, and if they scented the smoke and came to trace it, they would be within reach.

They did not, however. They remained talking in low tones, so low that Doyle could catch nothing of what they said. Then suddenly they stood aside, and in the doorway was the rajah, gesturing to the portal against which Doyle was standing.

"Go ye to the door yonder and guard it. In a moment Kulop brings—"

"Pardon, Tuan-ku!" exclaimed one of the two, saluting with his joined palms. "Is it truth that this woman of the *kafirs* remains here?"

"Eh?" said Mutamid. "And if it be true, what is it to you?"

"It is forbidden, Tuan-ku," said the Malay simply. "Is she not a *kafir*, an infidel?"

Your Malay, in moments of passion, darkens in hue. In the glare from the electric cluster above, the face of Mutamid became almost black.

"Dog!" he exclaimed. "Would you dare to command me?"

The man saluted again.

"Tuan-ku," he returned, quoting proverbs by way of indirect response, in Malay fashion, "when men are young they are held in the wombs of their mothers; when they are full grown they are held in the wombs of custom; when they die they are held in the womb of the earth. Strongest of these things is the womb of custom—is it not said that our children may die, but never our customs? And in this matter—"

"My will is to be obeyed," said Mutamid sharply. "Go and guard that door. If the woman comes, she is not to pass."

"Tuan-ku!" replied both men, and came toward the doorway where Doyle stood.

Fortunately the curtain was long, and he was hidden. When, after a few seconds, he peered forth again, he saw them within a yard of him, standing together, facing Mutamid.

Evidently the rajah was having his troubles; guards these might be, but for that very reason they were picked men and not serfs; picked warriors, independent, fanatical Moslems, to whose minds it would be scandal intolerable did their ruler bring a white woman into his house as wife or concubine.

Then, abruptly, the butler Kulop came swiftly into the hall.

"Tuan-ku! She is coming," he exclaimed. "She broke away from them—she is angry. I dared not use force. It was as you predicted, but she would not take the drink—"

"Good," said Mutamid quietly. "Stand aside."

Next moment, indeed, Ellen Harper came running into the hall and stopped short at sight of Mutamid standing there.

VII

JAMES DOYLE was astonished at the sight of her, and so was Rajah Mutamid himself, for she was not the same girl who had gone away laughing with Kulop at her elbow.

Now her face was a white, tense mask wherein her eyes burned and blazed with strange fires, as one who has seen some horrible and incredible thing. Doyle, despite the thrill of fury that stole hotly over him at sight of her thus, could not restrain a certain feeling of gratification that the thing was done. Nothing Mutamid or any one else could have said to her would have so opened her eyes as the talk and acts of those women who expected to hold her as

one of themselves—and they, hating her as the new favorite, would leave nothing unsaid or undone, to complete her education.

"Oh—you're here!" she cried out suddenly, facing Mutamid. "I want my uncle—where is he?"

"In the library, I believe," said the rajah. "What has happened, Miss Harper?"

"Tell me—is it true, what they said?" The words flashed out of her swiftly, incisively. "That they were to keep me there with them—that you meant to keep me here? Was it true, or was it a lie?"

Mutamid knew very well that any further pretense was quite useless. Captain Harper lay dead, which meant some sort of investigation; and it would be much simpler and safer to break this girl now, quickly, and have her taken away or hidden when the investigation came around. So he lighted a cigaret and bowed to her, smiling.

"My dear," he said, "it is quite true. You shall remain here and wear pretty jewels and you shall have everything nice that you like. Your orders shall be as my own. And perhaps we shall go to Canton and Shanghai, the city of pleasure, together—"

"Ah!" Her cry cut through his suave words like a knife, as she shrank a little. "Then—you mean it!"

"Naturally, I do," said Mutamid. "I regret to say that your uncle has suffered from a heart attack, apparently, and can not see you at present—here. Kulop! Take her back to the women. Help him, you two!"

The sharp Malay gutturals broke in as she moved. Her motion was to tear from her throat the string of pearls he had given her, and to throw it in his brown face.

"You beast!" she cried out. "So you tricked me—and you've hurt my uncle!"

Kulop sprang at her, and she struck him full in the face so that he staggered and cursed viciously. The other two men did not move, however, for an excellent reason.

Doyle, quietly stepping from the curtain behind them, seized a slender brown neck in each hand. The unseen, unexpected clutch paralyzed them; then, as his fingers sank in, a startled squawk broke from each of them—that was all. He swung them apart, then swiftly, mercilessly, dashed their heads together. The sound of it was heard clearly.

He let them drop and took a step forward, Mutamid staring at him, Kulop clutching for a knife, the girl wide eyed and motionless.

"Good evening, Mutamid," said Doyle cheerfully, and swung the Browning into sight. "You'd better tell that *kitmatgar* of yours to watch himself or he'll stop a bullet. Pleasant night, isn't it? Ellen, my dear, d'you want to come along with me?"

"Oh!" Her cry of relief was real enough. "Did you hear? Have you seen my uncle?"

"Your uncle," said Doyle calmly, "is dead. No use blinking the fact. Now, Mutamid, you'll pay a pretty heavy bill for your slick work, let me tell you, and you're lucky that I don't put a chunk of hot lead into your dirty carcass. However, it wouldn't do me any particular good, and I'd sooner have you alive for future reference—I may come back to Kuala Lembang some day, d'ye see? Ellen, look sharp! Go out through that door at the end, to your right. You'll find Hong, the steward, waiting with a car. Tell him I'll be right along. Move sharp!"

For a moment he thought the girl would faint, and had talked on rapidly to keep her mind alert. Now she pulled herself quickly together, but she was very white and stunned.

"Is it true—my uncle—"

"True as gospel, my dear," said Doyle, "and we'll be dead too if you don't move. *Move!* Do as I told you, d'you understand?"

"Yes," she whispered. "Yes—I'll go—please come—"

"I'll come in a minute," said Doyle. "Hurry, now!"

She obeyed, moving across the hall toward the entrance door. All this while Mutamid had spoken no word; he had turned black in the face as he recognized Doyle and felt the menace of the pistol, and his eyes glittered unwinking like the eyes of a watchful reptile. Kulop also stood motionless, waiting. Doyle knew he had the game in his hands now, if only he could get Ellen away safely to the car—for he had Mutamid under his weapon.

"You are a business man, Mr. Doyle," spoke out the rajah abruptly. "I do not know just how much you know of this affair, but I had nothing to do with Captain Harper's death."

"Except that you caused it," said Doyle. "Sure, I'm a business man. Last time we met, you plastered me proper. This time the boot's on the other foot."

"Conceded," said Mutamid, pleasantly enough. "But I should like you to keep your hands out of my business. I'm willing to pay very well."

"Undoubtedly," and Doyle chuckled. Ellen was at the main entrance now, opening one of the wide doors there. "How much will you pay?"

"Five thousand dollars in cash," said Mutamid calmly.

"Mex?"

"Gold."

It occurred suddenly to Doyle that the fire might as yet be unobserved, even by Hong. There was no sense in delaying matters, and Hong must receive warning in order to turn out one of the cars. Therefore, as Ellen swung open the door, Doyle jerked up the Browning and pressed the trigger.

The weapon clicked.

For one flashing instant, utter stupefaction seized upon Doyle. He had not examined the pistol—but it would be only too like Chukerjee to carry an empty weapon with which to impress beholders. Probably the Bengali would never dare use it in any case.

The door slammed—Ellen was gone. And all this, taking place in the fraction of a second, gave no opportunity to follow, to act, to move. Upon the click of the pistol, Mutamid at once comprehended his chance, and seized it. He was gone like a shadow, into the doorway whence he had just come, and Kulop, *kris* flaming out, was hurling himself at the white man.

At the same instant, one of the men lying on the floor, lifting himself a little, reached out and gripped Doyle's ankle, jerking him off balance.

Doyle reeled and plunged headlong—but the fall saved his life, spoiling the lightning thrust of Kulop, so that the *kris* sheared through his coat but missed his flesh.

"I have him, fool!" grunted the man on the floor, who had recovered from that impact of skulls. "Close the door, quickly!"

Kulop regained balance, turned, darted to the entrance doors and closed them. Meantime, the Malay on the floor had Doyle, indeed, gripping legs and feet, dragging himself higher, holding Doyle interlaced and helpless. Unfortunately for that man, Doyle's arms were free, and he was watching, coolly enough, for his one chance. It came. Like a piston, his arm plunged across waist and thigh, his knuckles drove into the straining, outstretched brown throat just below the Adam's apple.

For a bare instant, Doyle hesitated. At the entrance was Kulop—impossible to pass there without a fight. Behind, the library was undoubtedly a mass of flame and smoke by this time. Doors on the other side went to the women's quarters.

The crashing report of a pistol came from the lattice work at the upper end of the hall, and the bullet sang by Doyle's cheek. Mutamid was there, behind the thin carven woodwork of slender sandalwood that began three feet from the floor and ran to the ceiling. Mutamid's voice came, shouting orders, calling for men. Doyle jerked aside suddenly at another shot, which, this time, reached him. The bullet ploughed through the flesh of his upper left arm.

Now he saw exactly whence it came, however. Stooping, he picked up the empty Browning and hurled it. Before its impact the fragile old sandalwood

slithered and broke. Next instant Doyle was following it—following in a splendid springing leap that sent him up bodily four feet in the air and hurled him shoulder first against the lattice. A pistol roared in his face, fumes and flame blinded him amid the crash of splintering wood; then he had struck and was through, rolling to the floor on the other side, grappling for the frantic, desperate brown man who struck vainly at him with the pistol and could not elude his hands.

The thin, shrill Malay scream rose and fell again, and was choked off suddenly as Doyle smashed Mutamid's face against the wall, leaving him stunned momentarily. Then, seizing the fallen pistol, Doyle came leaping to his feet in the narrow corridor. He cursed desperately, for figures were rushing upon him, voices crying out from each direction—knives glittering, brown faces contorted in wild and furious rage.

He fired, fired again, point blank into those brown faces. Himself carried away, he hurled madly, furiously into the thick of them all, flinging himself at them bodily, crashing into and through and among them, firing, kicking, striking out like an utter madman. They opened out, closed in again before him like water, blocking the way; then like a wave they uprose in front of him, broke and spewed over him, bore him down underneath them, smothering, crushing, stabbing, filling the narrow corridor with bodies.

So, presently, the upheaval ceased and there came an instant of quiet. In this instant, uprose the crackling of flames, and wild uproar of voices from somewhere outside, so that the groans of hurt men shrilled into screams of panic.

"*Api! Api!*" pierced the wild shrieks. "Fire! Fire!"

VIII

WHEN Ellen Harper came flitting like a ghost from the hall of audience, across the central open space of the gardens, Hong was just wheeling out the fine new state Sunbeam from the garage. One man had been lolling there on guard, but was no longer.

Hong saw the staggering figure, halted the car, switched off its lights and jumped to the ground.

"Hong! Is it you?" cried out the girl wildly. "Go and help him! Help him, quickly!"

"Yes, miss," said Hong, and opened the car door. "You come. He will come too."

"You must help him," she sobbed, but his arm propelled her into the car and then he was leaping up behind the wheel in front, and the motor roared into life as the car swept out and away.

She cried out at him, pounded on the glass, furiously, vainly. Like a huge shadow the car fled down the drive and whirled through the open, unguarded gateway. Shots sounded from the palace, voices were rising, a thin red flame was sweeping up at one side. With a squeal of brakes, Hong drew the car to a halt outside the gates, in the shadow of the high trees that fringed the road here.

"You wait," he said, opening the car door, pressing something into her hand. "If any one comes, you shoot."

Then he was gone, leaving her sitting there, holding a pistol in her lap, sobbing.

She sat there a long while, an interminable while. The car was a dim blur of shadow under the trees beside the road. The palace grounds were shut out from her sight, but she could see the growing red fire glare, she could hear voices shrilling up. Folk came running, streaming up the road from the village below, chattering excitedly, scurrying through the dust, passing the car without a glance. From the palace swept the hot crackle of eating flame, and a high thin tumult of voices.

Then, turning into the shadow, coming from the palace to the car, the figure of Hong in the starlight, supporting something that dragged.

Instantly, the girl, forgetting everything else, flung open the car door and was out, running to join them. She caught at Doyle, and the drooping, hurt shape, torn and disfigured with dark stains, came

erect and laughed a little at the touch of her hands.

"Careful, miss," said Hong. "You help him. I start the car."

Doyle's head lifted, and for a moment he was quite erect, fumbling in his pocket.

"Ellen!" he said. "I brought you something—something made for you long ago . . ."

She felt his shaking fingers pass about her neck, but paid no attention to the object he left dangling there. Her arm passed around him.

"Lean on me; lean on me," she cried softly. "Oh! And you, who were so fine and straight like a sword— Oh! It's terrible!"

"Not a bit of it, my dear," said Doyle. "Everything's come right after all; must be a bit of a price paid, you know."

Somehow they stumbled to the car, whose engine was purring now. Then Doyle straightened again, with difficulty, for he was stooped with the pain of steel bites.

"Hong!" His voice lashed out sharply. "There are other cars—"

"None, sar," and Hong laughed in the starlight. "I cut all the tires, sar."

Doyle chuckled.

"Good! We'll get on together, Hong —ah!" He caught his breath sharply and then was in the car, falling back on the cushions. "Ellen, my dear—we'll go to Penang. Your uncle is buried as he would wish—a viking burial."

"Don't, don't!" exclaimed the girl. "Tell me where you're hurt—"

"I'm not," and Doyle laughed again. "The price—of jewels for a lady—"

His head fell back, and was pillowed in her arms as the car swept out and away, and its headlights glared out white upon the Penang road.

A Story of the Airways

The BREAKS *of the* GAME

By THOMSON BURTIS

AS KING LARSEN climbed the gaudily painted airplane along the edges of the airdrome his blue-gray eyes were resting moodily upon the huge white hangar and trim smaller buildings which stretched along the northern edge of the field. He flew his ship automatically and his ears were constantly tuned to the rhythmic roar of the eight cylinder motor, but his thoughts were on the ground.

He had forgotten the passenger in the back seat and for once the quiet glow of satisfaction which being in the air always gave him was absent. Below him was the Larsen Airport, fruit of fourteen years of unremitting application to the game he loved so well; but now there was neither pride nor satisfaction in his heart. Somehow the train of misfortune and tragedy which had dogged the steps of the Larsen flyers for the past two months had aroused a sense of foreboding in him. He straightened his big body, as though throwing a physical weight off his shoulders, and strove to forget his sense of impending ruin by thinking of more pleasant things.

Jimmy Glecker and Sue were due that afternoon, and the cryptic letter which his closest friend had sent him had hinted at mysterious news. It was like the boyish Jimmy to want to tell him whatever it was in person, rather than write it. It would be good to see Jimmy again; Sue, too. The year they had spent in San Francisco was the only period of any length the two airmen

had spent apart since their Army days.

He glanced at his instruments automatically as the biplane roared along through the flooding California sunshine. Temperature, battery charging rate, oil pressure, gas pressure—his eyes swept across the instrument board quickly, reading the needles at a glance. He could look down on the ground and swing his ship in an easy bank to head back toward the airdrome. He might just as well stay within gliding distance of it for safety's sake—

At that second, out of nowhere, it seemed, a small, dark shape hurtled into his vision. His hand on the stick moved with the speed of a striking rattler, but it was too late. The next second the propeller splintered into a thousand pieces as it flailed into a bewildered bird.

The roar of the motor rose to an anguished scream as it raced along at twenty-five hundred revolutions a minute, free of the weight of the propeller. In an instant he had cut the switches and sent the trembling ship into a dive to keep up flying speed.

He glanced around at the startled, middle aged gentleman who was his passenger and smiled reassuringly. There was no smile, however, in his steady eyes, and in his heart there was savage resentment at this tiny additional blow of fate. It was a small accident and yet, in his mental condition, it seemed but one of a thousand disheartening things which fate always had in store for him.

As his eyes swept the ground to find a field for a forced landing his ruggedly comely face was grim and set. Another passenger from the Larsen airdrome would have a far from reassuring tale to tell about his trip.

He swung the ship downward over a long, narrow field, studying it closely as he dropped earthward. It looked all right, but he must make no mess of landing. It was none too large and he had no motor to help him. The flyer's sense with which he had been born, plus four thousand hours in the air, were responsible for the perfection with which he synchronized altitude and speed as he banked his ship around a hundred yards back of the field and three hundred feet high and went into a gentle sideslip to kill both altitude and speed. Fifty feet back of the field and twenty feet high he brought his ship level with stick and rudder and dropped it over the fence and on to the ground.

There was nothing in that landing to be frightened of, he told himself savagely, but nevertheless he breathed a sigh of relief as he felt the plane on the ground. He thrust his head out the side of the cockpit, watching the ground ahead of him alertly. There was a clump of grass directly ahead—

The next second the right wheel of the undercarriage sank. It was a depression in the ground hidden by the grass. The nose of the ship snapped down and the right wing tip dug into the ground. King was thrown heavily forward, but saved himself with an upflung arm. There was the ugly noise of rending linen and splintering struts as the tail came up, and then all was quiet and he was sitting numbly in the seat of his wrecked plane.

He looked around at his passenger, and the next second he was unsnapping his belt and leaning back over the cowling. The portly lawyer was slumped forward in his seat, unconscious from a blow on the forehead. The crash had hurtled him forward against the cowling. Dozens of people were rushing toward them from the houses which dotted the landscape. Already a half dozen automobiles had stopped alongside the wide concrete highway a few hundred feet away.

The huge Larsen succeeded in getting the unconscious passenger out of the cockpit before help arrived and was examining him with eyes which were dark and brooding. Just a minor thump on the head, that was all, but it meant infinitely more than that to the Larsen flyers. His passenger, George Peabody, was one of the leading lawyers of Los Angeles, and this accident would be just one of a string of stories which the newspapers had had lately.

Five minutes later he had secured a

guard for the plane and was bound for the doctor with the unconscious lawyer beside him in the back seat of an automobile. An hour later, having seen to it that the badly shaken Peabody was safely home, a very solemn airman was being carried into the Larsen airdrome by a taxicab.

"There goes what little business there is left," he was telling himself deliberately, "to say nothing of two thousand dollars' worth of damage against an outfit that's broke now."

The taxi stopped beside the big hangar and King climbed out wearily. His big body moved with effortless ease and somehow there was a suggestion of panther-like grace as well as great power under rigid control. Those wide, sloping shoulders were a fitting base for the square jawed, rough hewn face which gave an effect of strength and competence in its broad outlines. Thick, blond hair tossed in the breeze and as he straightened he looked like one of the Vikings who were his forebears.

He paid the cab driver. As bowlegged, mahogany faced old Weatherby, his chief mechanic, ambled toward him, Larsen gave Weatherby no chance to speak.

"Cracked up the H eleven miles north on Colinga Road," he said slowly. "Right lower wing and outside struts smashed. Undercarriage splintered and no prop. Ran into a bird in the air and split it. Get the truck out and send a couple of the boys after it *pronto*, will you?"

The wizened old mechanic who had served under Larsen in France nodded and a cloudburst of tobacco juice inundated a passing ant. His crinkled eyes met his chief's for a moment, understanding in them.

"It never rains but it pours," he commented. "Your friend Jimmy Glecker and his wife are in the office waiting for you, Chief. I'll see to the ship. Anybody hurt?"

The elaborate casualness of that question could not hide the dread with which Weatherby asked it.

"Little bump on the head. He's O.K," Larsen told him deliberately.

He spoke with an habitual deliberation which gave the effect of making a very careful choice of words.

"I'll attend to it, Chief. Don't worry yourself," Weatherby told him, and ambled away toward the machine shop.

LARSEN walked toward the office in one corner of the hangar with long, unhurried strides, but his big head was bent and his wide, candid eyes were narrowed as they rested on the ground. He straightened just before entering the office and it seemed like an effort to square his shoulders and throw open the door.

"The King enters! Long live the King!" cried Glecker as he bounded to his feet. "How are you, big boy?"

"Not so good, Jimmy. Not so good. Hello, Sue!"

He bent over and kissed the smiling girl who looked so much more like a tiny, eighteen year old flapper than Mrs. James Glecker, former belle of Kelly Field when her father had commanded it.

She was slim and black haired and olive skinned in contrast to the red headed, freckled faced Jimmy. As they stood there smiling at him they looked like a pair of kids to King. As a matter of fact Jimmy was as old as he was and Sue herself was not much younger. Was he wrong, or had Sue changed in some subtle manner? Superficially she seemed the same, but her eyes seemed different, as though life had not been too kind to her.

"Well, you Scandinavian sardine, the Glecker family has moved to Los Angeles to stay!"

"No!" Larsen grinned and suddenly his somewhat heavy face was vitalized by a broad grin and his blue eyes were glowing warmly.

That grin seemed to light up his whole face. Laugh crinkles appeared as though by magic around his eyes and strong white teeth were dazzling against the deep tan of his face. Something warm and vital shone forth and the flying record of King

Larsen somehow became more understandable. That there was recklessness and daring and a huge joy in life within the inarticulate, plodding giant was very obvious then.

"Furthermore," Jimmy went on oratorically, "this day marks the return of James Glecker—the man who destroyed more American ships than the Germans during the war—to active flying!"

"Do tell!" Larsen grinned. "How come?"

"I can't stay away from it, King," Jimmy told him as he sat on the edge of the desk and lighted a cigaret.

There had always been something electric about Jimmy. His curly red head had seemed fairly to crackle with energy and from flashing smile to sparkling eyes he had always radiated a vast enthusiasm for life and everything in it. Somehow, though, his gaiety seemed forced and unnatural to King. Was it his own mental condition which made him imagine that every one else was bowed down by trouble? In the bold outlines of Jimmy's lean face and in the quickness and sureness of his every movement there had always been obvious the physical strength and nervous energy which made him the man he was. Now, though, it seemed that he was under a tremendous strain. He had always loved life with careless zest and what he had in the bank or what chances he took had meant very little to him. King had seen him climb out of the back cockpit of a ship and ride straddling the fuselage just for the fun of it.

"What is more," Jimmy went on, his over bright eyes darting around the room, "I'd be a sucker to stay out. Why, King, in five years the sky's going to be dark with airplanes and we boys who get into it on the ground floor are going to be somewhere. Hell, there isn't a kid in the country that isn't flying model airplanes—and our grandmothers have got a yen to travel by air!"

Larsen nodded.

"You're right," he said. "I haven't put fourteen years and a lot of money into it and stood all the grief I have, thinking I was backing a flop."

"We've had to drive Jimmy to the office with a whip for the last year," Sue broke in, smiling. "He's done nothing but live for this day."

"All that's been holding me back," Jimmy agreed blithely, "has been the little matter of insurance for the ball and chain here. Hard to get, in the first place, and didn't have the dough to spare in the second. They don't lean much to this flying gag yet in the insurance companies, but I've got it now."

"How is the kid?" Larsen inquired.

"Walked two months ago," Glecker told him proudly, "and what a little prize fighter he's going to be. He can hang on his hands, and everything."

"He'll have to be a Hercules to survive the play sessions that Jimmy indulges in with him every day," Sue interrupted.

"Make a man out of him," Jimmy laughed. "He'll be able to lick me when he's twelve. Well, King, here's the lay. As I said, I have twenty-five thousand bucks' worth of insurance and I'm rarin' to go. I'm going to take a few lessons with you to get my hand back in on these funny modern ships and then I'm going to work for you if there's room for me. How's that?"

"Sounds great to me, Jimmy," King told him quietly.

He ran his fingers through his thick blond hair. No one had ever seen King Larsen with his hair under good control.

"I can't wait to get started," Jimmy told him. "We drove the stuttering six down from San Francisco and she's parked outside now. Susie, old lady, how about you galloping it back to town—unless you want to stay around here while King and I go in the air—and I'll come in with King and he'll have dinner with us? We might even do a little refined guzzling in celebration. How about it?"

"Great with me," King told him.

"I'll do that," Sue nodded. "You two will be talking a blue streak for the next twenty-four hours anyway and I wouldn't

be able to get in a word. We'll see you at dinner, then, King?"

"Right, Sue. Jimmy and I'll come in together."

"Good! Goodby, honey." She kissed her husband quickly and led the way to the car.

MECHANICS were tinkering with two ships on the line. The roar of a motor on the test blocks was an unceasing drone.

"Gosh, I'm like a war horse scenting the battle from afar," Jimmy told King as Sue drove away. "How about going up for a little low and lofty stunting, King?"

Suddenly it seemed to Larsen that he must work off the foreboding within him. Perhaps a mad rush through the golden California air would bring a measure of peace to his soul and sweep the shadows from his mind.

"O.K. with me, Jimmy. I've got a new monoplane here, all metal construction, that'll make you stand right on your head. Some difference from the days when we used to nose down ninety horsepower Jennies to get speed enough to make a bank."

"I'll say," agreed Jimmy. "By the way, how did you slip into the field without my hearing you?"

"Had a forced landing and nosed over," Larsen told him. "Oh, Frank—" The mechanic he had shouted to turned from his work on a trim two seated monoplane. "Warm her up and fill her with gas and oil," Larsen instructed him. "We're going to go up."

"You've been having a lot of tough breaks lately," Jimmy told him, and suddenly his eager face was serious. "That Ryan crackup was a damn' shame."

"I'll say it was," Larsen said quietly. "I'm not putting money alongside of people's lives, but in addition to the black eye it gave the outfit, it cost us a cool twenty thousand and just about broke us."

"Was it really one of the passengers freezing the controls? I didn't want to talk about your troubles in front of Sue, or I'd have been getting the dope sooner."

Larsen nodded.

"No question about it. When we were taking poor Al Tunstall to the hospital he kept on raving, 'Get to hell away from those controls!' Mr. Sacks, the passenger that was delirious, was also yelling, 'Don't touch 'em, Sam!' The plane dropped in a spin about a thousand feet—I saw it with my own eyes—and then Samuels, who was sitting alongside Al, just got scared and froze the controls. You know as well as I do that anybody that can fly at all couldn't help getting the ship out of the spin unless he was interfered with."

Jimmy nodded.

"Gosh, it was tough," he said seriously. "And about every paper in the country carried it, besides."

Larsen nodded. The motor of the Fokker roared into life as the mechanic stood warming it. He raised his voice as he said:

"It seems as though for the last two months not a ship can take the air without some little thing happening, and the Breeden people see to it that it always hits the papers. Jimmy, there's no use of trying to kid myself. This part of California hasn't got much, if any, confidence in the Larsen ships, and they don't come out here to take their rides."

"What about your mechanics? O.K?"

"Absolutely. There isn't a more careful outfit in the world, I believe. Just a bunch of bad breaks coming all at once, and the Breeden people taking advantage of it by advertisements and gossip and all the rest of it. They're my rivals, if you don't know it. Sometimes I get Diamond Dick ideas about their being responsible for some of it somehow, but that's impossible. Anyway, I'm telling you the facts, Jimmy. This wreck today with Mr. Peabody is just about the last straw. I hate to say it, but you'd better not figure on working for me. This outfit's practically sunk. Not that I'm licked, don't think that—"

"Good Lord!" Jimmy said slowly, and suddenly it seemed that his face had aged ten years.

All the forced gaiety went out of him and he was drawn and haggard as though a mask had been wiped from his face. He straightened himself and sighed.

"King," he went on slowly, "I might as well come clean. I haven't got twenty-five bucks in the world. I did pay a month's rent on the apartment in advance—and no job. Sue's going to have another baby. Isn't there anything I could do; be a mechanic for twenty bucks a week, or something?"

King's fists clenched at his side as though the muscular effort helped him to control himself. Suddenly he felt as though the weight of the world was on his shoulders. He had seen the day in past years when Jimmy had figuratively taken off his shirt for him.

"I didn't know things were as tough as that with you," he said slowly. "Sure, we can fix it somehow. I owe so many thousand dollars that it's nobody's business, but how about a little loan of a hundred and fifty or so to tide you over, and we'll see what we can do?"

Jimmy glanced at him quickly and the shadow in his haunted eyes did not lighten.

"In up to your neck, eh?" he asked slowly.

Larsen nodded.

"But I'll get out," he said, as if to reassure himself. "Not a ship on this field is entirely paid for and there are more mortgages than I've got whiskers. This business of a few hundred dollars' damage every week hasn't helped, either, but you know a hundred bucks or so one way or the other in a situation like that doesn't mean anything. If you can fly the way you used to you'll catch on O.K. Let's go up, huh?"

A MOMENT later the Fokker was trundling across the ground for the takeoff. Jimmy was in the back seat—the passenger cockpit, in which there were no controls. King's eyes swept the instrument board quickly. All was as it should be and a moment later, throttle all the way ahead, the Fokker was hurtling across the ground. It seemed to King that he had needed this flight with his friend and that it was a safety valve for him.

Ordinarily the most conservative of flyers, he held the ship close to the ground until the air speed meter read one hundred and fifty miles an hour and then pulled it almost straight up in a mighty zoom which did not end until the altimeter read eight hundred feet. He turned around, and Jimmy's eyes glowed into his at that proof of what a modern ship could do. Somehow the redhead's eyes had something wild and untamed in them, as though he were temporarily transfigured into a different man. It made King curiously uncomfortable.

Five minutes later they had reached seventy-five hundred feet and King let go. He dived the ship momentarily, and then the stick came back smoothly and it arched over in a perfect loop. Using the speed of the dive coming out, he jerked the stick back into the left corner of the cockpit and jammed on left rudder. He held it there until the Fokker had turned on its horizontal axis twice in two continuous barrel rolls. Without an instant's pause, he pulled back on the stick at the conclusion of the last roll and sawed the rudder left and right. The ship fell off to the left, dived momentarily. Then the nose came up again and it fell off to the left as it reeled downward in a falling leaf. A few seconds of this and he brought it around in another loop, but this time as it went on its back he pushed the stick all the way forward and held it there. It flashed across the sky upsidedown and when he brought it out he sent it upward again, almost standing on its tail in a zoom to gain altitude.

His eyes were like two stars as he twisted the ship around in the air until it seemed like an aerial outlaw striving to throw off its riders. Every once in a while a wild stunt ride seemed to be the only thing which could satisfy some inward restlessness which nothing on the ground could assuage. He had forgotten his

troubles momentarily and was a playboy of the skies.

Diving again to gain speed, he brought the ship over on its back and the next second had turned it in an upsidedown barrel roll. As he came out he looked back at Jimmy. His eyes widened and his mouth fell open.

Had Jimmy crouched down in the seat? His heart seemed to stop beating as he forced himself to look down. A thousand feet below him, turning over and over in the air, was Jimmy.

King could not move or think. His eyes froze to that falling body and it seemed that all the tragedy which life could hold was in them. His face was as old as the world and there was a sort of bewilderment mingled with anguish so great that it was impossible for him to realize at the moment what was happening. He was mentally, spiritually and physically numb.

He saw Jimmy hit in a clump of trees five miles from the field. He shoved the stick forward blindly and it raced toward the ground at more than two hundred miles an hour. Hunched over behind the windshield, King Larsen, for the first time in all his adult life, was crying. Great sobs racked his giant body and for a long moment it seemed to him that the greatest favor Fate could afford him would be to allow him to run the Fokker into the ground.

Abruptly he gained control of himself. The roar of the racing motor and the shrill of the wires and the vibration of the overstrained ship seemed like the exultant yells of the demons of disaster. He steadied his ship automatically and spiraled down over the field. His face was set in lines of utter anguish and his pain filled eyes stared ahead unseeingly.

What had happened to Jimmy? Had the belt broken or had the careless, impulsive flyer not taken pains to buckle it? Could it have been deliberate? The thought of the brand new insurance policy flashed through his brain together with all that Jimmy had said. Had something within the taut flyer snapped—a sudden impulse to plunge over the side, find surcease from the pain of life and take care of Sue all at once? It was unthinkable!

The ship had scarcely stopped rolling after his landing when he was out of it and peering into the back cockpit. Somehow his brain seemed to be working normally in the middle of a nightmare. There was the belt, in perfect condition, but unbuckled, of course. It had not failed, or broken.

He felt instinctively that it was suicide, and yet he fought against the idea. Jimmy was careless and reckless, and perhaps he had not thought of his belt. King's thinking was faulty and he knew it, but he tried to persuade himself that it was the truth.

He got back into the ship and taxied to the line. Thank God the mechanics were all inside except Weatherby. Weatherby's face was drawn and his eyes were wet.

"I seen it, Chief. What happened?"

"I don't know," Larsen said steadily, "but he fell out. Listen, Weatherby. He had a brand new insurance policy, see? They'll call it suicide as sure as hell—he only got it three days ago—and never pay that dough. We get the belt out, see, right now."

Five minutes later in the machine shop he turned a handle with his own hand which slowly pulled the buckled belt until it broke under the strain. Two minutes later it was back in the ship, mute evidence of the fact that Jimmy's body had been thrown into space through its failure.

For a moment Larsen's and Weatherby's eyes met across the cockpit. The dried up little mechanic's voice broke as he said—

"This is the finish, Chief."

Larsen nodded. It was as certain as the fact that the sun was shining that written in the raveled shreds of that belt was the doom of the Larsen airdrome.

That afternoon was hell— Officers, newspaper men, curiosity seekers. Larsen, his face like a death's head and his eyes two pools of tragedy, got through it

somehow. As he climbed out of his car and went up to his apartment, he bought a paper. Sue was with her sister and there was nothing he could do for her right away.

He dropped into a chair and suddenly it seemed that there was not an ounce of strength in his body. He looked at the paper dully. There it was, three column headlines and the story in full, even the fact that there was the possibility of his being indicted for criminal carelessness in flying with unfit equipment. Two sentences leaped up at him from the page.

> The fact that Larsen, ruined by the series of misfortunes which have dogged his enterprise, sold his entire equipment to the Breeden Flying Enterprise, Incorporated, this afternoon, will probably quash any official investigation. Were Mr. Larsen to continue to operate the airdrome which bears his name, official action to safeguard the lives of the people of this section would have been inevitable.

A wintry smile stole over Larsen's face.

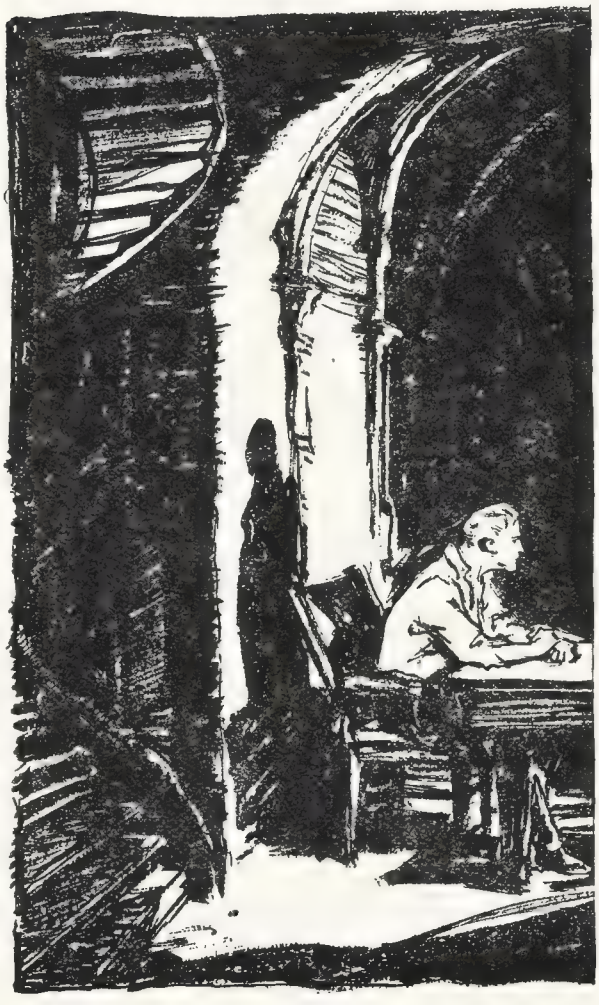
"Sold" was a broad term. Breeden had taken it over, agreeing to pay Larsen's debts in full. He had exactly two hundred and fifty dollars in the world.

He reached for the phone, and a moment later he was talking to Cy Mossman, young president of the Coast Air Express. When he hung up the receiver he had a job as an air mail pilot. Then he got drunk so he could sleep.

THE BELLS *of*

Beginning a Two-Part Novel by

ARTHUR O. FRIEL



PROLOG

THE BLACK sheep of the purse proud Woodford family, up in Westchester, is its youngest member, Harold, who disappeared some time ago.

His name is never mentioned at home now; and visitors are expected not to recall the fact that he ever existed. Since his socially climbing relatives have never explained why he dropped from sight, it is vaguely guessed that he must have done something so disgraceful that they had to ship him away somewhere. And, since he never amounted to anything anyway, Westchester is quite willing to let him remain in oblivion.

And oblivion in the current Westchester interpretation of the word does not permit the existence of the departed in a form even so concrete as a shade.

As a matter of fact, Harold was shipped away and did something which made him a pariah in his own home. But his family did not arrange for his departure, and his unforgivable offense took place later. The truth of the whole affair follows.

CHAPTER I

RESURRECTION

IN THE crowded grill room of one of New York's largest college club houses a man sat alone, scowling at a leaping tarpon on a wall.

The superb fish did not merit such dour scrutiny. Skilfully mounted, it curved

El Valle Perdido

THE STORY OF A LOST MEXICAN TREASURE, AND THE BLACK SHEEP OF AN ARISTOCRATIC AMERICAN FAMILY WHO FOUND HIS SALVATION IN THE QUEST OF IT.

outward and upward from its plaque as if still instinct with aggressive life. Contrasted with the darkly brooding heads of moose and boar and other mammalian game above and beyond, it was an inspiration to the souls of men. Those animals were gloomy as the forests in which they had been assassinated. The fish was bright as the moonlit southern sea where it had combated its captor to the end; and its taut body still exhorted—

"Fight on!"

But the bloat faced, droopy mouthed man lolling back on leather cushions regarded it with rankling hoplessness. His dull brown eyes replied—

"What's the use?"

Around him rumbled masculine mirth, repartee, argument, question, assertion, all blending into a mellow roar. Ice tinkled, forks clinked lightly, spoons rattled in cups, dishes clattered as waiters changed courses. Tobacco smoke thickened the air. An occasional silver flask gleamed momentarily above grouped glasses, vanished under a coat. The hilarity increased.

After awhile the lone diner drew forth a flask of his own, poured whisky into his coffee, gulped down the whole cupful. Men nearby observed him sidewise, glanced at one another, looked elsewhere. Only one put into words what the others thought.

"Woodford's sliding fast."

The talk flowed again at full force. Woodford sat forgotten. He poured more

coffee from the silver pot, more liquor from the silver flask, and stirred the mixture. But he did not drink it. His spoon revolved mechanically, and he frowned at the table top. Then he looked up, his scowl deepening. Amid the rumble of voices a new one had broken his thread of thought.

"Mr. Woodford," spoke the head waiter, deferential but incisive, "may this gentleman sit here? All the other tables are filled."

"Oh, yes," ungraciously replied Woodford. "I'm going in a minute."

His hostile gaze centered on a tall, lean, broad shouldered man with bronzed skin, black mustache, gray eyes, blue clothes well cut but not recently pressed; a man who seemed a foreigner, probably Spanish. For a second the two exchanged cool looks. Then the intruder abruptly refused a seat.

"Never mind. I'll go up to the main dining room. I don't fancy this atmosphere."

He turned aside. Then he wheeled back, steely eyes again probing the puffy face of the sitting man.

"Well, if it isn't Hal Woodford!" came an amused drawl. "What have you been doing to yourself, Hal? You look like the tail end of tough luck."

Woodford stared.

"I feel that way," he said shortly. "But who are you?"

"Doug Graham."

For several seconds longer Woodford sat staring, reaching behind mustache and burned skin and altered lineaments for the face of a youth whom he had formerly known well. Then he bounded up, overturning his liquor laden coffee.

"Doug!" he yelled. "Doug! You old ghost! Where've you been? Why, you're supposed to be dead! Dammit, explain yourself!"

"Sit down," laughed Graham, firmly pushing him back. "You seem a trifle excited. Sit down, I said!"

Woodford found himself again on the cushions, where he sat, dumfounded, while the coffee stained cloth was removed and a clean one deftly substituted. To the waiter Graham merely said:

"Bring me whatever happens to be good. Use your head."

Then he helped himself to a cigaret from Woodford's open case and gazed at Woodford himself. Men round about, some of them his own classmates, scanned him searchingly, but none intruded. Nobody had caught his name and, though he had once played football, none now recognized his face. After the momentary hush the rumble of voices swelled to normal volume.

"We've both changed," said Graham then. "I've grown hair on my lip and turned thin. I used to be a bit fat outside football season, as you'll remember. But you've changed just as much. You used to be clean skinned and clear eyed and fit. Now you're flabby and muddy faced and the whites of your eyes are bluish. What's the matter? Prohibition liquor?"

Dull red crept into Woodford's cheeks.

"What of it?" he growled. "What do you care?"

Graham laughed lightly.

"Nothing. It's your funeral, not mine."

HE DREW at the commandeered cigaret and exhaled slowly, meanwhile scrutinizing the sulky visage with the same disconcerting directness. His gaze lingered longest on the chin, inherently pugnacious, which counterbalanced the somewhat weak mouth. At length he resumed:

"As for me, I've been in South America and Central America, especially Mexico, for several years. As for my being dead, that was a slight error. A chap named Donald Graham—not Douglas Graham—got shot, and the names got mixed, and when I learned of it I didn't bother to correct the thing. I had no relatives who cared to know the difference, so— All right, waiter. That looks good. Set it down and bring something else."

Killing the cigaret, he ate heartily and speedily of whatever was put before him. When the coffee came he extracted a cigar

from a pocket, bit and lighted it, looked again at his *vis-à-vis*.

"Married, I suppose?" he quizzed.

"No," denied Woodford.

"No? Then what makes you so sour?"

Woodford's mouth thinned. His eyes rose, rested on the tarpon.

"Turn around!" he bade. "See that fish? That's me!"

Graham regarded the silvery shape, glanced back at his classmate, looked again at the husk which once had been full of fight. Then, slowly expelling a mouthful of smoke, he laid his forearms on the table.

"I see," he said. "He's dead and hung on a spike, but still fighting. You're not quite dead, but you're on a spike and fighting something. What is it?"

Again Woodford's mouth pressed tight. Then he snapped:

"Family! My damned family! They stuck me on a spike when I was born and never let me get off it. And they never will. I'm nailed to the family cross by pride of purse and bloated parental conceit and maternal social ambition and brotherly and sisterly hypocrisy and—"

He stopped short, gripping the table edge. For a moment he writhed. Then, in a choked tone, he said:

"Forget it, Doug. A man's a rotter who runs down his own family. And I'm a whining pup. Here, let's have a shot."

His flask reappeared. Before he could unscrew the top a hard brown hand closed over his own.

"Put that away!" commanded Graham. "We don't need it."

Eyes gripped. The flask sank. The outlander relaxed and grinned.

"I haven't been back long enough to take up the white man's burden," he whimsically announced. "And you've been carrying too much of it. I've been down in the barbarian lands where a man can get a drink any time, and consequently takes it only when he needs it. Up here in civilization, according to all I've heard, it has become every man's sacred duty to gulp all the bum liquor he can hold, and thus prove himself as good a patriot as those who held the Boston Tea Party. But I'm not acclimated yet. Give me time."

Then, softly, cynically, he sang in clear bass:

> "The Prohibition banner,
> Oh, long may it rave
> O'er the land of the spree
> And the home of the slave!"

At the end he chuckled. Woodford smiled and sat more easily. Graham surveyed him again, then turned serious.

"Hal, let me congratulate you," he said.

"On what?"

"On waking up."

The muddy eyes contracted, uncomprehending.

"I remember a few things about you, Hal, and a few things I heard about the family you're cussing now. And if you want to cuss 'em, why not?

"You never asked to be born into that family, did you? Of course not. Nobody does. We come into the world by chance and go out of it the same way. If we find our family despicable, why shouldn't we despise them like anybody else? Simply because we're trained from babyhood to believe that it's not the thing to do, and that we have to defend the family to the last ditch, and that unless we do we're cads. We may know they're all cads themselves, and we may fight them all in private, but in public we're supposed to say nothing but good about them. Why? For the same asinine reason that we're supposed to say nothing but good about the dead.

"We may know that a man was a dirty skunk, but after his carcass is put into the dirt where it belongs we must sing his praises, because some old Roman once said, '*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*'. We may know that our family stinks out loud, but— Oh, well, that covers the ground."

HE KNOCKED the ash off his cigar. Woodford regarded him unseeingly, groping for a memory which soon became more distinct: a casual statement by some classmate that Graham was an orphan, work-

ing his way through college; also, that he had to work because money left him by his parents had been filched from him by other relatives. The hard brown man now lounging at the table had every reason to condemn family fetish.

"As for you," continued that ruthless iconoclast, "we football men used to say, 'Woodford's got guts, but they don't last.' You'd play a good fighting game on the scrub teams, but then when you were getting close to varsity caliber you'd suddenly quit for the rest of the season, saying you were tired of it. So you never got anywhere. And we couldn't quite understand it. You'd taken enough pounding up to that time to prove that you weren't yellow. So we decided that you could go about so far and then turn lazy. But I get it now. About the time you looked like a sure comer the sport writers would put your name in the papers, and then you'd hear from your family. Right?"

"Exactly! I was expected to keep my face from being kicked out of shape, so that after graduation I could marry some society snob with millions of money and no brains. And I still am!"

"Uh-huh." Graham regarded him keenly again. "And in the meantime you've kicked it all out of shape yourself. But it will become human again if you give it a chance. Take it away somewhere and treat it right."

"Meaning what?"

"Oh, take a trip. Snap off your spike. Go away somewhere on your own, stand on your own legs, forget your family awhile. Also, forget the booze. In short, be yourself!"

Into the dull eyes crept a glow. They dwelt again on the tarpon. The glow became a live flame. But then it darkened and died as if doused by cold water.

"More easily said than done," declared Woodford gloomily. "A man has to have money to travel. I haven't any. I never earned a dollar in my life. I never was allowed to. Now I don't know how to start. And will my father give me the funds to get away from him? He will not!

"He's on my neck right now with an ultimatum. I have to marry a female, fat and forty but not fair, with a bankful of money and a social position. Or I can go starve. And he'll see to it that I do starve. Even if I took a job sweeping the streets he'd make me lose it. He used to be in politics here, and he has a pull like a locomotive and the vindictiveness of the devil. And, whatever I do, he'll break me. He's made that plain. So has my mother—I mean the rest of the family.

"My brother and my sisters married as ordered, and they're as nasty to me as the old man. I've dodged marriage thus far, but this is the showdown. If I don't become the tame poodle of that pot bellied widow they'll hound me till doomsday. They're a full house, and their influence reaches much further than you'd suppose. I'm a deuce in the deck. A full house always beats a two-spot. That's an axiom. So where do I go from here? Nowhere!"

His fists gripped the table edge again. Graham breathed another exhalation of smoke into the thickening air, smiling oddly, looking amused by the poker language with which the rebel had ended his plaint. Then he laid down his cigar and drew from a pocket a small, oblong leather case ornately carved by some skilful Mexican workman. From it he extracted five poker dice.

"One of my many bad habits," he remarked, swiftly shaking the cubes and casting them on the board. "I get more kick out of rolling the bones than I would from a drink. They've kept me company in many a lonesome place, and sometimes they help me think, which is always a painful process. And—er—"

He stopped, swept up the dice, thumbed them back into their container, looked once again at the tarpon. While he talked he had thrown the cubes of chance three times. Woodford stared at him queerly. With eyes slowed by liquor and ears attentive to the rambling remarks, he had

not observed that the tumbling squares had fallen in such formation that each time the one nearest him had been an ace.

"Let's see," Graham mused aloud, "one name for the tarpon is 'Silver King,' isn't it? That's right. And there might be something in that, too."

"What the devil are you talking about?" demanded Woodford.

"Eh? Oh, excuse me. My mind sort of wanders at times."

He faced back toward his table mate.

"Hal, there's always a way out of a jam, if a man can see it," he declared. "And I can see a way out of yours, if you'll use it. I'm going back to Mexico soon."

Woodford blinked.

"I don't quite follow you, Doug." He hesitated.

"Not yet. But something tells me that you soon will. Come on; let's get out of here. I've taken a room upstairs for the night. Let's ride up there and talk further. Waiter! The checks!"

"I'll take care of the checks," interposed Woodford. "Let the old man pay them. He settles all my club bills for the sake of my supposed social standing."

"So? Well, I rather think I don't want anything from your old man," refused the newcomer. "And I have a guest card, so let me use it. I got it from Frank Armstrong, who got on the ship at Havana. You remember him; he used to play tackle. He's in the bosom of his family right now, but we may see him later. All right. Let's go!"

He handed the signed slips to the waiter, arose, and strode toward the elevator shaft, walking with a free, dominant swing. Woodford trudged behind, head up, chin out, but heels slightly dragging. Other men glanced at his receding shape, noted the faint lack of coordination, smiled without mirth and resumed conversations.

The elevator came and went. The two men were gone. And from that day to this the club members have never seen them. Probably they never will.

CHAPTER II

A PYRAMID OF THE PAST

THE SMALL but seaworthy steamship *Monterey*, docking at Vera Cruz, discharged passengers into the greedy maw of the customhouse and then moved over to the freight pier. Soon thereafter, one of its stewards jumped ship.

Nobody mourned his disappearance. Newly hired, he had proved to be both inexperienced and insubordinate. Once, when sworn at by the chief steward, he had even punched that sacred personage on the jaw. So now the chief wished him plenty of misery in Mexico and dismissed him from mind. By the time the ship sailed eastward again the fellow who had answered to the name of Ford was thoroughly forgotten.

In the observation car of the Mexican Railway train which left Vera Cruz shortly after daybreak, steamer passengers bound for Mexico City wondered momentarily who was the companion of the Señor Graham. To one or two his face seemed vaguely familiar, but nobody could quite recall it. The lapse of memory was quite natural, for hardly any one remembers a cabin steward after landing. During the voyage he has been merely an animal which made beds and emptied slops, and at its end he is an open hand into which some money should be laid. If he fails to appear at the tipping time he is all the more willingly dropped from mind. And one does not expect to see such an insignificant creature wearing expensive New York clothes, riding away from his ship in the most expensive car of a long distance train and associating on equal terms with a coolly reserved gentleman. Consequently nobody recognized the cheaply uniformed, sullen eyed Ford. Still less did any one suspect, then or later, that he could be one Woodford, scion of the wealthy Woodfords of Westchester, whose mysterious disappearance eventually became a subject of speculation by New York newspapers.

Now the distantly polite Señor Graham

and his still more aloof companion sat side by side, talked briefly at intervals, ate together and ignored all others. And as the train climbed steadily from the sun scorched dreariness of the coastal region into the flowery exuberance of the rain belt, and from there on up over the edge of the lofty, arid plateau which is the real Mexico, they were ignored in turn. The stupendous mountain scenery between Paso del Macho and Esperanza was such as to shrink all human beings to the status of insects. And from that point onward the irresistible lassitude of the highlands overwhelmed most of the newcomers from the sultry Gulf.

For hours Graham and Woodford exchanged few words. The former volunteered occasional bits of information concerning the huge mountains and deep gorges and tiny towns among which the twin rails squirmed ever upward. The latter was even less talkative, for his eyes were absorbing the passing panoramas. Those eyes now were much more alive and alert than they had been a fortnight before, and the face which then had been soddenly rebellious was firmer and alight with interest. Even when the massive steeps were left behind and the cars were speeding across the comparatively featureless table land, he continued to watch everything, while his seasoned comrade dozed in the Spanish siesta.

As the sun drew low Graham yawned, stretched, and drawled—

"No nap, greenhorn?"

"No. Too much to look at."

"Uh-huh. Ho-hum!" The tropic veteran smothered another yawn. "Well, you'll get used to the afternoon snooze after awhile, if you stay long enough. It's one of the old Spanish customs, with a lot of sense behind it. But a Northerner has to learn it. Let's see, where are we now? Oh, yes. Now use your eyes for all they're worth. We'll soon see the whole spirit of Mexico all in one spot, and at least a thousand years of history in about one minute."

Woodford peered outward again, seeing only a flitting expanse of dry brush backed by a far range of ocher hills. Soon Graham spoke again.

"There it is. The pyramid."

Above the bush growth rose a sloping, flat topped shape, looking stubby and dwarfish. Across the line of fleeting undergrowth, against the long column of rambling elevations, it seemed a mere bump of variant gray amid the prevailing tan. Woodford frowned at it.

"The most famous pyramid in Mexico," added his informant. "The Pyramid of the Sun."

"What! That?" scornfully exclaimed Woodford. "That wart? Why, I've seen pictures of that pyramid, and it looked huge. But this thing—"

"Is the Pyramid of the Sun," Graham cut in. "And it is huge. It looks to be about half a mile from here, eh? But it's farther off than you think. This highland air fools your eyes, and that long horizontal line of hills fools them still more. I'll take you out there in a day or two and lead you up its staircase, and by the time you reach the top you'll know you've been somewhere. It's nothing to sneer at.

"But that's not the point. That little old pyramid was there long before America was discovered by Cristobal Colón, now known as Christopher Columbus. It was there before there were any Americans, or any Mexicans, or any Aztecs, or any Toltecs, or any— Well, nobody knows who got here before the Toltecs. And not only that pyramid was there, but other pyramids not yet uncovered, and a big city stretching for miles around them. And that big city was merely the metropolis of a vast country. And that whole huge population vanished without a trace long before the wisest men of the Old World even suspected that there was a New World. And since that time thousands upon thousands of other people have vanished in this same country, also without a trace. And thousands more will do the same. And among them may be you and I. And what of it?

"Well, there's the spirit of Mexico. Soak it up now. Whole races have dis-

appeared here, and what of it? People are dying all around us today, and what of it? You and I may get ours tomorrow, and what of it? What are any of us but bugs crawling on the face of Nature? If Nature happens to lift a thumb and smear us into nothing, what of it?"

Woodford was silent. Soberly he watched the prehistoric structure, around which countless generations of virile people had lived and died. Rapidly it moved backward, receding, diminishing, until it was wiped from sight by a curve in the steel road. For some little time thereafter he continued to stare outward, still seeing in memory the gray stone pile which had so quickly appeared and faded out, and realizing that it was an epitome of this strange land called Mexico.

The long wanderings of the first nomads to come here, the settlement of the land, the development of a metropolis, the toil of thousands to erect that pyramid, the centuries of life around its base, the gradual decline or sudden extinction of the laboriously wrought civilization, the arrival of successive new waves of migration to marvel at the works of their unknown predecessors—these were but the futile movements of insects enduring for only a few seconds in the eternal existence of the universe. Compared to all this, what were the life and works of any one man?

Miles fled fast behind. At length he said:

"That's right, Doug. We're just bugs. But while a bug lives it's entitled to at least one good bite of blood. I've never had mine."

"You're likely to get it," predicted Graham, with a thin smile. "And it's likely to be a mouthful."

His face sobered and his eyes became solemn. Woodford looked searchingly at him, then glanced out at the setting sun.

"Bring on your rough stuff," he invited. "And the rougher the better. I still don't have to marry any scheming widow. Oh, Death, where is thy sting?"

At that Graham's lean face cracked wide, and from his throat welled a recurrent chuckle.

The train thundered on toward Mexico City, now near at hand. Soon after sundown it came to rest in its terminal. And two Americans, still smiling, left yesterday and today behind them and fared forth into tomorrow.

CHAPTER III

SOMEWHERE WEST—

UNDER a colossal brown *ahuehuete* tree in Chapultepec Park, Graham and Woodford lounged on a plank bench and placidly smoked Mexican cigarets. Around them reigned the infinite peace which is the natural heritage of Mexico, and which is disturbed only by turbulent humanity.

Since this was a weekday, hardly any one was moving through the ancient forest which once had been the pleasure ground of Aztec emperors. The sun sifted through thick foliage, birds called and answered, faint aromas of growing things drifted on vagrant breezes, as they had done thousands of years ago, when these huge cypresses were young. Into the prehistoric woods the noise and motion and scheming of Mexico City, just outside, did not penetrate.

Graham drew a last puff, gazed at a long gray beard of Spanish moss pendent from a brown branch, and spoke.

"Well, what do you think of Mexico thus far?"

The response was swift and positive—"I like it!"

"Uh-huh." Graham smiled slightly. "I thought maybe you would—thus far. You've traveled the tourist trail, personally conducted. In the past few days I've shown you the usual stuff, with a few variations the usual tourist doesn't get. You've had your chance to absorb the general atmosphere of this country. Now if you'd like to ramble back to the States I can fix it for you. The trip has done you a lot of good, physically and mentally, and if you let it go at that you'll be show-

ing sense. What I'm going to do after today may not be sensible or safe. Now be frank. The way out is still open."

Woodford stared. Into his cheeks flowed a deep red tide.

"How do you get that way?" he challenged. "Do you think I came all this distance and worked as a contemptible animal to get here, only to see a few sights at your expense and then sneak back home?"

"Oh, no. But things far away look different from those close at hand. And it's a wise man who knows when to quit."

"Well, I'm no wise man. And I'm no quitter either! Maybe I was once, but that time is gone. I'm here to stick. And it's about time you told me what we're to do next. Or don't you want to let me in on it? Are you giving me the gate? Have I fallen down somewhere? If so, say so!"

"No, *hombre*, you haven't slipped up once," assured Graham. "I've been watching you all the way. To be truthful, I had some doubt that you'd carry on with that miserable steward job I got for you, and more doubt that you'd keep sober. In fact, you may remember that after we left Havana I used to leave a bottle of Bacardi in my stateroom, where you'd see it when you tidied up the place. That was a sneaky sort of test, maybe, but it told me what I wanted to learn. You never touched it. And I've kept an eye on you ever since and found you making good all the way. I'm satisfied. I just wanted to know if you were."

"If I were dissatisfied I wouldn't be with you now."

"All right. Enough said. And now, if you're determined to stick, I'll give you the real plot of this piece. Up in New York you didn't have to know it, so I kept it to myself. You were so eager to get off your spike that you jumped at the chance to go anywhere, by any means. And until I could try you out a bit I wasn't giving away anything. I'm Scotch, you know."

He chuckled, arose and strolled a little way along the *calzada*, shrewdly scanning the butts of the great trees. Reassured that no eavesdropper lurked near, he returned, sat again and spoke freely.

"Somewhere west of here, Hal, there was once a rich silver mine, in a pocket in the mountains which was hard to find. And there was a little town and a big church. And the church controlled the town and the mine and everything else round about. Its inner walls were sheathed with solid silver, and its priests waxed exceeding fat in wealth and body and led a merry life.

"Then came one of the sudden revolts which happen so frequently down here, and all hell raged for quite some time. The priests had to get out of there, and everybody else got killed, and the church was stripped of all its wealth and became just a hollow shell. But before the catastrophe the folks thereabouts concealed the mine entrance so well that nobody has been able to find it since. So the mine is lost, and the valley itself is so hidden that it's now almost mythical. People call it El Valle Perdido—The Lost Valley.

"Centuries have rolled along since the priests left the place, and they've never gotten back there, and probably never will. At present they're being hunted down and shot by the federal government. The question of whether the church or the government is in the right depends on your own personal bias. I haven't any.

"But that's not the point. There lie the Lost Valley and the lost mine. And by a queer twist of luck I know where that valley is and approximately where the mine must be. And that's where you and I are going."

WOODFORD sat spellbound. Graham gazed at the woods, seeing them only subconsciously. His mental vision was far off, viewing the hidden valley. Soon he went on:

"Life's all a game of chance. And if a fellow plays it according to his own feelings he's as likely to get somewhere as the

people who slavishly follow stereotyped rules. For instance:

"Awhile ago I was riding around, and happened to find a Mexican priest dying from hardships. Maybe, as a supposed law abider, I ought to have handed him over to the government soldiers who were hounding him. But I didn't. Instead I protected him and did all I could for him. That wasn't much; he was on his way out, and soon went. But just as he was going he gave me a tip that sent me over to that valley.

"I found it, and found that everything checked up with what he said. But I didn't quite locate the mine. My food ran out, and I had to leave. Then, not having much capital, I turned a bit foolish and went to New York to try to finance the scheme of starting up the mine again. That was a large error. Your New Yorkers just tried to suck all the meat out of my coconut and leave me with an empty husk, and when I didn't give up all I knew they weren't interested. So now I'm—"

"Wait a minute!" interjected the listener. "Why didn't you try to finance it right here?"

"Just because, as I said before, I got slightly foolish. Thought I'd prefer American backing. When a man's been away from the States a few years he forgets that American financiers are just as snaky as those of any other country, and he pines for the 'Stars and Stripes Forever'. I'm cured of that now. Tomorrow I start out on my own, with my last dollar sunk in the search for that old hole in the hills. If things don't pan out—" he shrugged. "Well, that's the proposition," he concluded. "Take it or leave it."

Young Woodford sprang up, eyes agleam.

"I'm taking it, Doug! Lead me to it! But— Umph! Let's see, now."

The light faded from his eyes, giving way to practical consideration. Then he went on:

"I'm no miner, but I know it takes time and labor and money to dig out mineral. I have no money, and you say yours is sunk. After we find the mine, who pays the laborers that work it? If we try to do our own work it will be slow going, and who feeds us while we—"

A laugh interrupted him.

"Good head!" approved Graham. "I didn't suppose you'd think of that. Well, the answer is that there's some pure mineral, in bars, somewhere inside the mine. It seems that when that old war broke loose a load of silver bars ready for overland transportation was run back into the hole and left there. As soon as we can find those bars and get them to a market we'll have both cash and credit. After that we ought to be able to keep things moving."

He arose, stretched, glanced around again.

"But that's a rather late step in our general march," he added. "The first one is to reach El Valle Perdido, which is quite a long hike from here. The second is to locate the mine, the third is to find the bars. And we might stub our toes before we get that far. This funny old country can sprout obstacles in the path of the pilgrim with uncanny speed, and a chap needs to watch every step as he takes it. So let's not worry about working the mine until it's found. And meanwhile let's toddle along toward it. Are you still with me?"

"All the way!"

"All right. Let's go!"

CHAPTER IV

THE LOST VALLEY

IN A RUINOUS townlet some two hundred miles westward from Mexico City a huge stone church glowered at the surrounding mountains.

Old, empty, unused by any creatures nobler than bats and buzzards, it was but a skeleton of former grandeur. Yet it still dominated the crumbling dwellings of the vanished men who had reared and worshiped it, and scowled inflexibly at the pagan giants round about it. As ever,

those eternal Titans ignored it. They slumbered on in their own lofty sunshine, contemptuous of all human buildings and beliefs.

Among those bulky sleepers wormed a few ancient roads, once well kept, now nearly obliterated. Along one shrunken path which still remained passable, a short cavalcade climbed in single file to the top of a pass.

Two white men led; one long, lean, bronzed, the other more squarely built, less deeply tanned. Behind them came three pack horses, heavily laden. At the rear rode four silent Mexicans, drowsing in their saddles, yet subconsciously awake to everything around them. All six men were well armed. Rifles hung in saddle scabbards, revolvers swayed in leg holsters, cartridges studded waist belts or *bandoleras*, and hilts of concealed knives peeped from under the waistbands of the Mexicans. Though small, the party was equipped for vigorous defense against obstructionists.

The leaders reached the crest of the pass. The tall one drew rein, lifted a long arm in silent signal. At once a seemingly sleepy Mexican behind the pack animals voiced a quiet word. Everything stopped.

"Well, Hal, there it is," announced the long rider.

His mate peered from under his wide felt hat at the decayed town below, then scanned the cordon of arid mountains.

"It looks as dead as a forgotten cemetery," he commented.

"And it is," affirmed the other. "You'll find no social life here; not even a fat widow."

The shorter man smiled, once more surveying the whole desolate scene. Suddenly his gaze narrowed.

"I hope you're a true prophet, Doug," he said. "But who are those people riding over yonder?"

"Huh? Where?"

"Along that squirmy path coming down from the narrow notch at the north."

The gray eyed horseman scowled intently across the valley. Miles off at the left, several small shapes were moving gradually down a yellowish thread of road.

"Good eye, Hal," he approved.

With that he drew binoculars from a belt case and focused them. For a long minute he sat motionless. As he lowered the glasses his frown deepened.

"Looks as if we were going to have company, uninvited and undesirable," he grumbled. "And there's something queer in that outfit."

He passed over the glasses. Gazing through the strong lenses, the discoverer of the distant party discerned ten riders, all topped by huge straw sombreros. Eight traveled with slouchy ease. The other two, in the middle of the short column, rode stiffly and wearily.

"A couple of them must be hurt," he guessed.

"Maybe," came the noncommittal answer. Then the gray eyed man turned in his saddle.

"Pancho!" he called. "*Aquí!*"

The foremost of the Mexicans straightened from his somnolent droop and crowded his mount past the pack animals. His hard brown face remained stolid, but his dark eyes glinted with expectant eagerness. His mates sat alert.

"Señor?" prompted Pancho, reining in.

"Other *hombres* come yonder."

The native gazed at the unwelcome arrivals from the north, contemplated the empty town, and murmured:

"*Sí, señor.* And the pueblo belongs to those who occupy it first. Shall we go?"

His tone was so gentle that the señor regarded him with a twinkle.

"We shall, my little angel. After making this long pilgrimage to meditate in the wilderness it would be unfortunate to be denied the privilege."

Pancho's strong teeth showed in a quick grin.

"*Sí.* Unfortunate for somebody."

He shifted his bandoleer an inch, still grinning. Graham chuckled. Then the brown man turned back and the white one gave his horse free rein.

"Come on, Hal," he prompted, trotting off. "We'll grab the town before those

other pilgrims get there. There's no rush. We have a lead of at least a mile, and this road is screened by brush all the way. But we may as well be moving."

SETTING the pace, he moved on down the winding track. All others followed, none but Woodford showing anticipation of trouble. He glanced at his rifle, fingered his revolver, sought to peer through the roadside fringe at the now vanished strangers. Presently he looked back at Pancho, who now rode close behind. In the Mexican eyes he glimpsed the sardonic amusement of a veteran watching the nervousness of a raw recruit. Flushing, he turned his gaze straight ahead and gave his weapons no further attention.

After a few hundred yards he remarked—

"I begin to see now why you brought along these bandits."

Graham's head did not turn, but his reply floated back clearly.

"They'll be useful. And they're not bandits. Outlaws, yes. Killers, yes. But not robbers or criminals. They're outlaws because they're irreconcilably anti-government on this question of expelling the priests. They fought for a militant archbishop they liked. Very decent fellows, in their own way. And very loyal to any one they trust."

"Humph!" grunted the novice. "Is any Mexican loyal?"

"Humph nothing! You wait and see."

The remarks ended as a bold cliff and a sharp turn necessitated careful riding. Thence onward, no more was said.

Down, down, down the party meandered. Then the road leveled and straightened. The column cantered across an ancient stone bridge spanning a narrow stream. At once it was in the town.

Roofless, lifeless houses of tumble down adobe flanked the riders for a short block or two, then vanished behind. Around them opened the *plaza* whence towered the defiant church. That square, once dutifully clipped and shrubbed, now was rank with wild verdure. But through the tangled growth still led a curving path, formerly a broad avenue; and along that track the treasure seekers advanced in sudden final rush. It halted in a clear space, paved with stone flags, before the wide steps of the edifice.

There Graham drawled a few words in Spanish, drew his rifle from its scabbard and dismounted.

"Come on, Hal," he directed. "Let's go sit in the shade while the boys work."

Unhurried, he walked up the mossy steps, shoved open a great wooden door, looked inside a moment, then sat and lighted a cigaret. Woodford hesitated, looking and listening for the northern invaders; then swung stiffly down and climbed to join his partner. The Mexicans already were off their horses and displaying unusual energy.

Without one useless motion the outlaws stripped their beasts, led them into the tall brush growth and left them there to browse; carried saddles and baggage into the church, and dropped their loads somewhere inside the doorway. Then they took seats on the steps, laid their rifles beside them, and lounged in apparent nonchalance.

Woodford, watching all, regarded the natives now with a puzzled frown. They had doffed their bandoleers, pushed their sombreros to the backs of their heads, assumed attitudes of utter unconcern. True, they still wore their waist belts and side arms and had their longer guns within swift reach. But they looked and acted entirely unexpectant of combat. And Graham's pose was even more incongruous. Holding his cigaret with one hand, caressing his Spanish mustache with the other, he gazed at the brush as if day dreaming.

Minutes dragged past, while Graham placidly smoked, the Mexicans interchanged occasional brief jokes, and the observer's nerves tightened toward the breaking point. Then Graham tossed away the stub and remarked:

"From the standpoint of practical psychology we have a slight edge on our visitors. We're in possession, and look as if we'd been in possession for some time;

horses turned out, men loafing, baggage invisible. Moreover, we're sitting higher in the air than they will be, so we literally have the upper hand of them. Those little touches sometimes help."

Woodford squinted at a little lizard which scuttled across a warm step. Then he blurted:

"What's the use? Why not ride to meet those chaps, show them our gun muzzles, tell them to get out, and blow them out if they don't start?"

Graham laughed indulgently.

"You're a bloodthirsty cuss, Señor Woodford of Westchester," he bantered. "When you've seen as much blood as I have you may not be so eager for it. It's really sort of messy. But, aside from that, I still suffer from that queer old Anglo-Saxon idea that one ought to give the other fellow an even break until he proves that he's not entitled to it. Moreover, men you attack at sight never tell you anything. Kid them along a bit, and you may learn things worth knowing.

"In this particular instance, I want to know who that outfit is and what's queer about it. So we'll sit quiet and let them show us. They have to come here, because this is the only place in town that has a roof, and— Ah, here they come!"

Into the surrounding silence crept a confused trample of hoofs, slow but steady, advancing along the western side of the *plaza*. Soon it turned into the thick brush. Another minute passed, while each man on the steps held his careless pose. Then appeared a vulturine figure on a weary horse, who suddenly checked his mount and stared.

Hook nosed, lank cheeked, narrow eyed, he scanned the loafers with the swift calculation of a bird of prey. Close behind him, another man of similar predatory visage arose in stirrups to see and scowl. Those farther back remained temporarily invisible.

For a few seconds the tableau held. Then, without greeting, the leader moved forward again, watchful, ready for any hostile word or move. His followers came in turn, equally wary. One, two, three of them emerged from the brush, tensed for attack or retreat. Then, more slowly, arrived the pair whose apathetic attitudes had been noticeable miles away. At sight of them Woodford's eyes widened, and Graham's pupils narrowed.

"Uh-huh," breathed the latter. "I thought so."

The two drooping riders were prisoners. They were white. And they were girls.

CHAPTER V

A GAMBLE

WITH dogged determination the band from the north filed into the clear space and halted in line, confronting the loungers. The eight swarthy men scowled at their predecessors. The two pale girls, shrouded in long cloaks and half masked by masculine shade hats, looked despairingly at Pancho and his gang; then, with startled hope springing into great eyes, stared at the pair of *gringos*.

The foreigners coldly returned the gaze of all. Then the tall one lazily arose, right thumb hooked over his cartridge belt, long fingers hanging near his revolver butt, eyes fixed on the leader.

"*Zopilotes*, you have picked the wrong roost," he drawled.

Pancho and his men grinned. The scowls of the other Mexicans deepened. The *zopilote*, or Mexican buzzard, is thoroughly filthy; and the casual use of the epithet made it the more insulting. But no offensive word or action retaliated.

Instead, the vulturous leader slid his emotionless gaze again over the holders of the steps, observed anew their plentiful weapons and arrogant air, and expectorated thoughtfully. Eight tired men against six ready ones—the odds were negligible. And there might be other men behind the insolent six. He eyed the dim interior of the church, looked sidewise at the town, heard horses munching in the brush behind him. But, after a perceptible pause, he countered with outward fearlessness—

"Who says so?"

"I!" asserted Graham. "And who questions me?"

"Pascual Zinzimeo."

Graham's lids contracted. Pancho and his fellows glanced sidelong at one another. The *zopilote* on the horse smiled nastily, lips downturned. Pascual Zinzimeo, bandit leader, was notorious for his atrocities, and his name was a terror in the region. Soon, however, the white man laughed contemptuously.

"The *zopilote* would be a harpy eagle, eh?" he ridiculed. "Zinzimeo has only one eye, and is twice as heavy as you. Get out, buzzard, and pray that he never will learn that you tried to borrow his name."

The other probed his poker face. In a less assured tone he asked—

"Do you know the chief?"

"Whose chief?"

"Mine—Zinzimeo."

Graham laughed sarcastically.

"Do I know Zinzimeo? Too well to swallow your lies! He would never have such specimens as you behind him. You are all a bunch of *ratones*, he mice, sneak thieves, whom Pascual would crush under heel. Bah! Get out!"

A brief silence. The horsemen eyed him uncertainly, awaiting initiative by their leader. That leader spat again, more reflectively than before. Then suddenly one of the girl prisoners spoke.

"Señor!"

One word, no more. But the voice was charged with anguish, the drawn face under the broad hat filled with desperate appeal.

At once the leader turned on her with a snarl and vicious language. At the same moment Woodford arose, jaw out, rifle clutched hard. He had not understood the belligerent converse, but he had read the two piteous faces.

"Say, Doug," he said thickly, "cut out the palaver! These girls are captives, and—"

"Sit down and shut up! I'm handling this!"

Woodford glared, gritted his teeth, sank back. The attention of the horsemen had been momentarily distracted by the girl's outbreak. By the time they looked again at the steps all seemed unchanged.

Graham looked coolly at the girls, bowed with mocking gallantry and replied—

"Señoritas?"

No response came. The two regarded him with dumb reproach, drooped again. He grinned cynically at the spokesman of the gang.

"They're not so bad," he remarked. "What will you take for them?"

A cruel grin flitted over the thin lips of the *zopilote*. But he declined:

"I can not sell them, señor. They are the property of the chief himself."

"Oh, stop lying!" roughly ordered the *gringo*. "How much?"

He unhooked his thumb, slid the hand into his money pocket. The horsemen followed the motion wolfishly. But, after perceptible hesitation, their leader repeated:

"I can not sell. The chief will soon be here."

"What chief?" derisively countered Graham.

"Zinzimeo!" snapped back the other. "Believe it or not, he is our chief. We raided a town a few days ago. These two are his own private plunder. He was hurt a little in the fight and will come here to rest and amuse himself. We have come on ahead. And we wish to use this roof until he arrives. If, as you say, you are his friend, you can not object to that."

HIS VOICE, angrily defensive at first, grew cooler and firmer toward the end. It was plain that he was telling truth and that he relied on his ferocious commander to back him in all he might do. But the señor remained outwardly unimpressed. His reply was:

"This roof is our own. If Pascual comes we shall gladly share it with him. Until then you can wait elsewhere. Is he close behind?"

"No," came the grudging admission. "He may not arrive for a day or two."

Graham laughed sarcastically.

"And he may not arrive for many years. Your story is too thin, *zopilote*. Go, build your own roof on any of these empty walls in the town. You can not sleep here."

He withdrew his hand from the pocket in which it had rested. Some small object dropped, struck stone with a dull click, rolled over the edge to the next step. Every rider's eye automatically followed its fall. It was a white cube; one of Graham's poker dice.

Graham looked at it with a sudden frown of concern; stepped down, snatched it up, held it aloft, rubbed it lovingly on a shirt sleeve, put it carefully back into the pocket. Then he again faced the bandit detachment, gaging their expressions.

Those expressions were odd. Anger at their contemptuous dismissal was merging into something else, not yet clear, but aroused by the suggestion of a gamble. The leader's look was queerest of all, for he thought of several things at the same time. The day was ending; the work of making a roof was repugnant; the holders of the church were hard *hombres* and would fight for its possession. A fight would mean death to somebody—probably himself. Also, the girls might be shot by wild bullets. In that case Zinzimeo would vent merciless rage on him. But the tall *gringo* loved dice. He himself was not a novice at throwing them. And so—

"Señor," he said smoothly, "let us not quarrel. Let us settle our difference by a friendly little gamble."

His right hand shook expressively in air, flipped sidewise.

"There on the lowest step. You and I alone," he added. "The winner has the church. The loser sleeps where he may."

The bleak face of the señor thawed.

"*Muy bien*," he acquiesced. And he walked down the steps.

The *zopilote* promptly dismounted and advanced. His men moved their horses forward a little. Then Pancho's deceptively gentle voice advised:

"Stay where you were, noble *caballeros*. You can see well enough from there."

After one quick look the riders reined back. Without noticeable motion, Pancho and his followers had lifted their rifles from the steps to lie across their thighs. The wide shouldered señor at the top was scowling, and his right hand was at his belt.

At the middle of the bottom step, smoothed by many feet now forever gone, the two commanders knelt. Graham passed his dice to his antagonist, who shook them in cupped palms, tossed them, watched them settle on the stone, and tried again. At each experimental throw his cold eyes grew slightly warmer with innate passion for gambling. So did the face of every mongrel in his pack. Although the Spanish blood in their veins was diluted and debased by vicious Indian strains, it still answered avidly to the challenge of luck.

"*Bueno*," approved the yellow man. "They are good. Three rolls?"

"Right. Shoot."

In rapid alternation they shook, threw, scanned results. Both parties of Mexicans craned necks to read the upturned symbols. Woodford alone maintained thorough vigilance.

"That settles it," laughed Graham. "You sleep in a hut."

The brigand scowled at the final hand, then shrugged. By a very narrow margin, his opponent had won.

Graham picked up the cubes, rubbed them along a thigh, shook them idly in one wide palm. His eyes dwelt speculatively on the loser's horse.

"That beast is not so bad," he remarked. "My own is better, but— Well, how about it? Three rolls more? My horse against yours?"

Clickety-click sounded the alluring bones in his hand. The hearer hesitated but momentarily. His horse looked good enough, but was hard gaited and nasty tempered.

"*Sí!* Three rolls for a new horse. Roll them!"

They rolled. The luck reversed itself. Graham's best hand was two pairs, aces

and tens; that of the *zopilote* a full house, kings over jacks.

"Humph!" muttered the señor, ruefully. "Your luck improves."

The winner grinned, displaying snaggy front teeth broken by some blow.

"Even a buzzard may have luck," he retorted, in jeering tone. "And now where is the horse?"

"Yonder." Graham nodded toward the brush. "You shall have him, never fear. But first let us roll for something good. For instance—"

SHE DREW forth a Mexican gold pouch, elaborately carved. From it he dumped five yellow twenty peso pieces, which he dropped beside the inert dice. Their bright gleam and quick clink brought to every bandit face an avaricious light.

"Cover that," dared the white man.

The yellow one's eyes clung to the gold. He swallowed audibly. At length he reluctantly confessed:

"I can not, señor. We have no money. But if you will let me bet the horses of my men—"

"Ho-ho! Hardly!" The señor glanced contemptuously at the weary animals. "It takes gold to cover gold. Come, now, you must have some loot on those pack animals: gold vessels from some church, or something like that. Bring them out, and—"

He gathered up the dice, awaiting answer. The bandit swallowed again.

"No, we have no such things," he grudgingly denied. "The packs hold only necessities of travel. The chief gave us only the women to guard."

The *gringo* frowned, looking disparagingly at the captives. Then he smiled.

"Oh, well, then put up the women," he challenged. "They are worthless to you; you dare not touch them. If you lose you can be gone before Zinzimeo knows of it. This is a large country, and there are other chiefs besides Pascual. If you win, a hundred pesos are in your pocket."

He flipped the dice to fall among the coins. The bandit struggled with fear and greed. The white girls lifted their faces again, sudden hope reviving.

For dragging seconds the latest winner debated inwardly. Gold before his eyes—click of dice in his ears—luck improving at each gamble . . .

"*Bien!*" he hoarsely yielded. "Toss them, señor!"

"After you."

"No!"

"*Sí!*"

Eyes locked. The señor moved his right hand toward his belt.

The vulturine gaze dropped. The yellow hand gathered the ivories, shook, threw. The forefinger tapped a pair of kings, hovered over a queen, sank without touching it. The other two were jack and ten.

The tanned white hand swooped, lifted, rattled, flung three kings, ten, nine; grouped the kings, and rested.

The yellow one spun another king, a queen, two jacks, a nine. The white one cast two queens, three jacks.

For a perceptible interval the Zinzimeo men considered. Thus far the score was exactly even. Again he eyed the gold. Then he suggested:

"Everything on the last hand, señor. Those two do not count."

"As you please." Graham shrugged. "Roll them. Time grows short."

Rattle; click; roll. Silence. Three aces, two kings.

The snaggy teeth showed again, triumphant. Graham, expressionless, shook and tossed. At the same instant he arose, placing a foot on his gold pieces.

"You lose," he calmly announced. "Give me the women *muy pronto.*"

On the step rested five aces.

"And," added the cool voice, "stay just where you are until the señoritas are delivered. And give the word to deliver them at once."

His gun hand hung once more beside his holster. The humped shape looked up, venomous. For a brief moment nobody moved or spoke. Then the loser grated:

"*Mujeres, aquí!* Women, come here!"

The women obeyed quickly. Wordless, but star eyed, they heeled their horses into forward motion. Without a glance at them Graham instructed:

"Dismount. Go inside."

Again they obeyed. Off their dusty steeds they sprang, and up the steps they fled to sanctuary. The shorter one stumbled. Her companion caught her arm, steadied her, impelled her onward. Together they swept past Woodford, to vanish into the dimness beyond the door.

Then the *zopilote* arose, keeping his hands well away from his weapons. With feigned carelessness he suggested—

"My horse, señor."

"Of course. Come with me and get him."

Stooping sidewise, the *gringo* caught up his coins and dropped them into a pocket. Then, side by side, the two walked into the brush of the *plaza*.

The subordinate bandits watched them go, eyed one another furtively, peered again at the holders of the steps. They were seven against five, and their leader had slid them a meaning look . . .

Pancho grinned artlessly and caressed his left ear. As he did so, the rifle on his thighs moved to point directly at the horsemen. So did the guns of all his men. The stocky señor at the top was watching keenly, fist taut on his revolver butt.

A tense minute passed. From the brush sounded no sudden shots announcing the assassination of the *gringo*. Instead, the *zopilote* leader reappeared, ugly mouthed but careful of step and demeanor, leading a bay horse. The tall señor sauntered behind him, hand still close to his holster.

"*Buenos noches*," he said pleasantly as they emerged. "Good night."

The bandit made no answer. He stalked away toward the decayed village. His men followed, equally taciturn, leading the riderless animals with them.

"Well, Hal," drawled Graham, ambling back up the steps, "without any blood and thunder, or thud and blunder, we seem to have collected a couple of women. Let's go and look at them."

CHAPTER VI

GUESTS

SIDE by side, the two prizes of the dice game stood in the twilight of the lofty nave, facing the man who had won them. That man and his partner, with vision momentarily unadjusted to the interior dimness, regarded them in silence.

The taller girl, still protectively clasping the arm of her companion, held her head high and returned their gaze with outward composure. The other, shrinking against her, looked upward timidly from under the curving brim of her huge straw hat, swept the faces of the dust stained, unshaven men, then dropped her head.

"Señores," spoke the first, "we thank you."

Her voice was a rich contralto, her enunciation clear. Yet it held an almost imperceptible tremolo and an involuntary note of appeal.

"Señoritas," responded Graham, "you are welcome. And permit me to assure you that you have nothing to fear from us."

With the words he removed his broad Stetson and bowed with the grace of a Spanish cavalier. Woodford followed his example instantly, though more stiffly.

Glad light leaped into both feminine faces. The taller girl subtly relaxed; the shorter one stood straighter.

"I was sure," murmured the first, "that you were gentlemen."

"No, you were not," genially contradicted Woodford. "But I think we are."

He smiled whimsically. An answering smile sprang to the lips of the tall ex-captive. Her long fingers rose, pulled off her misfit headgear and tossed it aside.

"Now I am positive of it," she replied. Then, aside, "*Chiquita*, throw off the ugly sombrero."

The other girl obeyed and, when the masculine hat was dropped, passed a hand about her head, unconsciously rearranging stray locks of hair. The men stood wordless, viewing the pair anew.

Black hair, white foreheads, curving black brows, completed pictures hitherto half masked by the conical sombreros. Under the perfect arches were wide, steady eyes of deep, dark blue; piquant noses, alluring lips, dimpled chins . . .

There the features differed. The chin of the tall girl was broad and firm; the other was small and hesitant. Otherwise the resemblance was unmistakable.

"They're sisters, Doug," muttered Woodford.

Both pairs of blue eyes darted to him. The contralto voice replied, in easy English:

"You've guessed right, sir. And are you brothers?"

The men stared. Then Graham chuckled and Woodford grinned.

"Not quite, but almost," answered the former. "Are you girls Americans?"

"Not quite, but almost," came a quick echo. "Our father is American. Our mother was Spanish. We are the Señoritas Raymond."

She paused, evidently expecting surprised recognition of the name and involuntary homage to it. Instead, Graham's gaze turned satiric, his tone dryly sarcastic.

"Yes? We are Graham and—ah—Ford, from the United States. Not Henry Ford, by the way. We're just a couple of wandering ne'er-do-wells, without any background. Or, for that matter, any foreground. And we have not had the honor of ever hearing of Mr. Raymond. Pardon our ignorance."

The elder Miss Raymond flushed at the inference of snobbishness.

"Pardon *my* ignorance, sir," she parried. "We have not heard of you, either. Down here the name of Raymond has been of some importance, but— Well, what are names, after all?"

Graham smiled again.

"Exactly. This is one town where family doesn't count. You are you, and we are we, and that's that. And night comes on apace, so to speak, and we'd better get settled. And that reminds me of something. Excuse me a moment."

He bowed again in courtly fashion, turned, strode to the door. Both pairs of girlish eyes followed him, then turned to Woodford. He stood watching his partner. So he missed both the direct gaze of the outspoken señorita and the shy but penetrating glances of her sister. The former, after a quick survey, looked again toward the door. The smaller girl's covert attention did not swerve.

"Pancho!" called Graham. "Bring the horses inside and shut the door. Buzzards sometimes swoop at night."

"*Sí, señor,*" came the chuckling answer. "I thought of that. The boys are gathering the beasts now."

Graham turned back at once.

"Come on," he curtly instructed the waiting trio.

HE MARCHED across the empty nave, long since robbed of its pews, opened a small door at the rear and passed through the wall. The others followed without question. Through a short corridor they trod, up a winding stair, and so into a large room which was almost bare. Circular, dome roofed, its walls were pierced by several arched doorways, high windows and narrow slits. In the center stood a massive table, long unpolished, but quite clean. Beside this were three heavy chairs, at which Graham glanced as he entered.

"Good!" he remarked. "Nobody has been here since I went, two months ago. The chairs are just as Pancho and I and another fellow left them. The other fellow has absorbed a bullet since then, I hear, so we won't see him any more. He and Pancho had a slight disagreement, and Pancho is an unlucky *hombre* to disagree with. However, that has nothing to do with us, so let's sit and be comfortable. The boys will bring up some water soon from a private well down below, and after that we'll eat, and then we'll hang beds for you girls in a little room yonder, and—"

"Hang beds?" interrupted the tall Miss Raymond.

"Exactly. In other words, hammocks. There's nothing else here to sleep in. This place was stripped long ago. The table remains because it was too big to be taken out; must have been built inside this room. The chairs must have been overlooked. I found them in a small room back yonder. Anyway, they're here, so sit and rest in them, girls. And, by the way, do you smoke?"

He drew a packet of cigarets from a shirt pocket. Smiling, the Misses Raymond declined the offer. The girls sank into chairs, and the younger one sighed wearily. Graham and Woodford sat on the table, the former carelessly swinging long legs, the latter quiet. From below sounded a *cloppety-clop* of hoofs and a rumble of masculine voices, followed by a ponderous thump. The horses were within the walls and the huge door was shut.

"Well, now," continued Graham, "Ford and I are here to poke around and see what we can find, if anything. We're fairly respectable, even if we do look a bit tough at present. Our men downstairs are medium hard boiled, but good eggs, for all that. And none of us is acquainted with Zinzimeo, regardless of what I said out there on the steps. That was just a bluff. A chap once told me what that buzzard looks like, so I remembered the description and used it. It seemed to work all right, but things aren't always what they seem. I was lying, and maybe my little playmate with the big beak was doing the same. Was he? Does he really belong to Zinzimeo?"

His easy talk and languid poise relaxed the nerves of his auditors. All at once the smaller girl dropped her face into her hands and sobbed.

"Anita, dear!" soothed her sister, slipping an arm across the heaving shoulders. "We are safe now. And you have been so brave through it all . . . Don't cry, *chiquita!*"

"I've—I've been wanting to cry for a long time, Juana!" wept Anita. "And—and now I—I can't help it!"

The men glanced at each other, slid off the table, started doorward. But Juana stopped them.

"Please don't go!" she requested. "My sister will be herself again in a minute. And—I am a little nervous myself in this desolate place. Please stay!"

Slowly the men came back. Woodford spoke.

"You're both tired," he asserted. "Suppose we let you rest awhile. Talk can wait."

A momentary silence. Graham looked quizzically at the protégé whom he had rescued from women. Juana darted an odd look at the man who hitherto had been so dumb. Anita ceased sobbing and sat up, misty eyed but smiling.

"Pardon—pardon me, señores," she gulped. "I am—all right now."

For a fleeting instant she met Woodford's gaze, then diverted her wet eyes to the dusty table top. Juana came again to her rescue.

"The *zopilote*, as you called him, was not lying," she said. "He and his men belong to that foul Zinzimeo, and Zinzimeo will soon be here. They raided our town, as he told you. It is a mining town—Jacuariago. The garrison there was called into the field a week ago to fight rebels. Two days later the Zinzimeo gang came in. They captured the place easily. And the things they did—"

Her lips contracted and her hands clenched. Graham nodded.

"Never mind that," he prompted. "The things Zinzimeo does are best forgotten. But—ah—your father?"

"He is safe, thank heaven! He had to go to Mexico City a few days before the attack came."

"I see. And your mother?"

"She died three years ago."

"And there is nobody else?"

"In our family? No. There were servants, of course. But, of course, they deserted us at the first shot."

"Of course," echoed Graham. "The one thing you can always trust servants to do is to sneak when trouble breaks. And you're lucky if they don't cut your throat and steal all you have before they

go. Well, now, let's see what comes next in our present predicament."

HE GAZED thoughtfully at one of the old gun slits in the outer wall.

"This place," he mused aloud, "used to be not only a church but a fort, they say. And as a fort it's still good against anything smaller than artillery. This particular part seems to have been a dormitory and refectory in times of peace, and a fighting tower when the heathen raged. It commands the whole town. And there's a belfry out in front that gives a view of everything inside the mountains. The old *padres* used their heads when they designed this layout. With a whole townful of people inside here and nothing much but Indians outside they could more than hold their own. But times have changed."

He paused, still looking at the ancient opening whence cumbersome muskets had belched slugs at beleaguering hordes in days long gone. Then he spoke decisively of the immediate future.

"Well, you girls would like to go home again *muy pronto*, of course, and we'd like to put you there. But that would be a bit difficult. There's only that one road out to the north, and the Zinzimeo gang will be using that. There's another road out to the southward, but we chaps just came in on that and don't feel inclined to ride back on it immediately. We have a little business here to attend to. And those eight buzzards down below might obstruct the start, anyway. They may fade out tonight, or they may not. And in any case, we'll all just have to stay here awhile and take things as they come. And here comes something now. *Venga*, Hilario! Come in!"

Hilario, a merry eyed outlaw whose name fitted perfectly, advanced from the threshold with one arm piled with tin cans, the other supporting aluminum dishes. With rough and ready speed he set the table, opened the tins, and withdrew. Meanwhile another man noiselessly entered, set down jars of water, laid hammocks beside the door, lingered a moment with a significant leer and faded away down the stairs. As he went he still grinned over a shoulder. There were only two hammocks to serve two white men and two white girls.

Deep color dyed the cheeks of the observant Juana. Graham's pupils narrowed. But he nonchalantly remarked:

"Miguel's sense of humor is a trifle raw, but the food isn't. Now would you prefer beef or salmon with your tomatoes? It isn't Friday."

A quick laugh answered.

"If it were Friday we'd probably eat beef, just to be contrary," said Juana. "As it is, we'd love some salmon."

"Fine! Woodf—ah—Ford and I are beef eaters, so the combination is perfect. Let's go!"

As the sun faded behind the hulking hills, the room which once had echoed to the noises of priestly fellowship murmured again with sounds of good cheer. Knives and forks clinked eagerly. A tall white man and a tall white girl fenced with jocose remarks. A shorter white man and a small white girl ate with few words, yet repeatedly probed each other's face and form and manners with elusive glances. From the winding stairway came occasional rumbles of jovial laughter, wafted aloft from the throats of Pancho's gang. The nearness of Zinzimeo's buzzards, the imminent arrival of Zinzimeo himself and the rest of his merciless followers, were temporarily forgotten. The passing moment was pleasant, and the next one was not yet born.

Moment to moment, snatching life and pleasure while it lasts, heedless of hovering destruction . . .

Such is the spirit of Mexico.

CHAPTER VII

THE BOYS GO RIDING

MOONLIGHT, bright and clear, shone through the gun slits and the high windows of the domed tower. Bats flitted overhead, looking curiously at two masculine shapes resting

side by side on a long table; veered, shot out through the nearest opening, and swept abroad again in their nocturnal quest for food. If they noticed that a door leading into a side corridor was shut, they gave not a single squeak of resentment. And if they sensed that the longer man was awake though he seemed asleep, they made no noise about that, either. Their immediate need was the nightly bellyful of bugs. So they went and got them.

Beyond the closed door slept two girls in hammocks; sisters exhausted by days of physical fatigue, repressed terror and hideous anxiety. Now, safe and protected, they had let go all holds. On the broad board in the main room, the owners of those hammocks rested fitfully. Woodford slept, awoke, moved, sank again into oblivion. Graham lay bodily inert, mentally alert.

Imperceptibly the bright beams moved along the dusty floor tiles, shortening as the moon rose higher. Intense silence ruled the ancient pile. The restless breathing of Woodford seemed preternaturally loud.

But at length came other sounds, soft, mysterious, floating up the spiral staircase. Something creaked; something which might be a door opening down below. Graham's eyes opened. His ears listened intently. A smile passed over his lips. No further sound came. But he waited for something more.

Sudden tumult shattered the silence. Rapid gunshots broke out, thudded for a few seconds, ended abruptly.

Woodford started up, pistol in hand, eyes stabbing into the shadows. For several seconds he sat tense. Then Graham yawned.

"What's the matter, Hal?" he quizzed. "Do the bats bother you?"

"Bats nothing! I heard shooting!"

Graham chuckled.

"Dreams are funny things," he mused aloud. "A man can live a hundred years, or fall a million miles, or go through all sorts of battles, while he's just turning over in bed. You probably heard me snore a bit. I do sometimes. Sorry."

He yawned again, moved a little, took a long breath. Woodford slowly relaxed and lay back. After a time he fell again into the deep pool of sleep.

The moonbeams grew shorter. At length, far away at the north, thundered a single deep boom.

Woodford stirred, turned over, blinked at vacancy, listened. Graham snored softly. The listener smiled, closed his eyes, relapsed into slumber.

More time passed. Then came a vague confusion of muffled noises, suggestive of hoofs on a grass grown street. They stopped. A little later the door downstairs creaked again, closing with a stealthy bump. Ghostly voices floated up the stair, muttering, whispering, laughing in restrained tones.

Graham arose, quizzically regarded the sleeper, then walked to the stairs and down. In the short corridor below he stood a moment looking at a small knot of men grouped around a single candle. All were cleaning revolvers.

He advanced. They glanced up, grinned, made room for him. He squatted, produced cigarets, lighted his own from the candle, passed the light to Pancho. The small flame went around the circle, sank to its former place. The cigarets glowed red. The weapons lay on the floor, disregarded.

"I heard noises," remarked the señor.

Teeth flashed in dark faces. The cigarets glowed again.

"We went visiting," presently volunteered Pancho. "The men we visited were rude to us. We resent incivility. So there was a regrettable accident."

"*Si.* I judged so."

"*Si, señor.* Then we all decided to take a ride. We rode north. By chance we took with us a stick of your dynamite, señor. At a place where the north road curls around a bold slope we thought our rude friends might be growing tired, so we laid them down to rest in peace. And soon the side of the hill above them accidentally exploded. And much earth slid

down and covered up our sleeping friends. And the landslide wiped out the road also. Thus any one who happens to be coming to this valley from the north will be blocked."

"Ah. That is unfortunate. But these hills slide when they will, of course, and no man can stop them. By the way, did the horses escape?"

"*Sí, señor.* Oddly enough, this fellow Lorenzo happened to lead them back some distance from that place before the slide occurred. And, still more odd, the men who were covered up left all their guns and cartridges and other equipment here in town when they went riding. So we now have much more than we had at sunset. And, as I said before, the road of General Zopilote—I mean Zinzimeo—is entirely closed. It is all very sad. But accidents will happen."

An irrepressible chuckle escaped Graham. Responsive snickers sounded all around the lone candle. Then the white man arose, once more poker faced.

"Pancho, you are a damned rascal, and all you boys will undoubtedly go to hell," he declared. "But whenever you are ready to go there I'll be ready to go with you."

"*Sí*, we know that," grinned Pancho. "*Buenos noches, señor.*"

"Good night."

With a sidewise swipe, the retiring señor affectionately knocked off the killer's sombrero. Then he faded into the dark and was gone.

The outlaws laughed throatily and resumed their gun cleaning. When the job was completed they blew out the candle, lay down on the stone floor and peacefully slept.

On the table upstairs Graham chuckled.

"Good men!" he murmured. "That helps a lot. And now good night, girls and boys and Zinzimeo buzzards. I'm tired."

His eyes closed, not to reopen until dawn.

CHAPTER VIII

SUNSHINE

BRILLIANT sunlight flooded the mountain girt valley; sunlight high and ardent, yet robbed of sea level ferocity by mile high altitude. Later in the day it would fill the bowl with languorous desire for siesta. But now, at midforenoon, it inspired action.

In the *plaza* four Mexicans methodically cut down brush. Their *machetes* rose and struck with monotonous regularity, the bushes toppled, the men advanced and slashed new stems without pause or words. They seemed prosaic *pelados*, peons, mere automatons, born with muscles but no brains. Certainly they did not look like men who had gone forth last night, slain twice their number, blown down a hill, blocked a bandit army, without direction by a superior brain. Even less did they suggest that before breakfast they had stabled their horses in abandoned houses, made brooms and swept the church clean. Yet such was the case. To any inexperienced Northern mind the sequence would seem illogical. To theirs it was intuitive.

On the steps, two white girls basked in the sun; girls who had been pale and drawn last night, but who now were refreshed by long sleep. Their cheeks and lips bloomed with renewed color. Their eyes, softly aglow, dwelt pensively on the slowly receding backs of the laborers, lifted occasionally to the hard hills, returned, seeing only subconsciously. Their minds were elsewhere; perhaps northward, where stood their looted home; perhaps eastward, where their father might still be sojourning in ignorance of their abduction; perhaps much nearer—for instance, up overhead, where their hosts and protectors were engaged in an odd pastime.

At the top of the massive *campanario*, where bells green with age hung mute, Graham scanned the hillsides through binoculars. Woodford peered at the same slopes, but hardly saw them. His eyes, like the deep blue ones on the steps far below, were dreamy.

Both men were better groomed than at nightfall: newly shaven, garbed in fresh khaki, revivified by sleep and early baths and unsoiled clothing. Woodford's face was smoothly self-barbered. Graham's jaw was clean cut, his straggly mustache neatly trimmed. Once more both looked and felt like *caballeros*. Yet, as the gray eyes continued their search, the bronzed face beneath them grew less and less content.

At length Graham lowered his glasses and flexed arms wearied by long rigidity. In a grumbling tone he muttered—

"They certainly did cover it up."

"What?" Woodford came out of reverie.

"The mine."

"Oh. Is that what we came up here for? You said you wanted to look for that bandit Zuzu, or whatever his name is. By the way, what became of those buzzards of his?"

Graham smiled oddly.

"They went for a ride, and I doubt if they'll be back. But—ah—what I'm really looking for is that mine mouth. It's somewhere within sight of the door, or will be when the boys have cleared the brush off the *plaza*. But if it can be seen from there it should be visible from up here. I can't find the slightest indication of it."

He frowned at the uncommunicative giants at the south, whose brown sides were splotched at random by clumps of trees and freckled by outcrops of stone.

Woodford surveyed the same scene with renewed attention; then gazed down at the *plaza*, estimating the radius of vision from the door. It would cover about ninety degrees, and would not be intercepted by any houses; for, though moldering huts flanked both sides of the church and grouped thick at its rear, some priestly decree had prevented construction on the fourth side of the square. But nothing remotely resembling a mine entrance was visible on the ground stretching away and climbing to the irregular crests.

"Well," he said slowly, "if the place were self-evident it would have been rediscovered long ago, of course. But I understood you to say, Doug, that you had a straight tip from that priest of yours."

Graham frowned slightly.

"I did, as far as it went," he asserted. "Unfortunately, he didn't live long enough to finish it. His last words were, 'It is seen from the door.' Right there he passed out. But that's enough. Maybe the old-timers used a telescope to see it, and maybe the angle of vision up here is all wrong. Anyway, the stuff is here somewhere. And when the *plaza's* clear we'll get the right line on it."

Woodford nodded and turned briskly to the guano caked stairs.

"That's right, I'll bet," he assented. "Let's get down and speed up the brush cutting."

He started away. A saturnine chuckle checked him.

"A lot you care about brush cutting," drawled Graham. "A seat on the steps is what you want."

Woodford reddened. Then he smiled crookedly.

"Well, when you know of anything better to do lead me to it," he invited.

"All right, I shall. Now get out from under foot."

They descended the dark spiral, crossed the nave, emerged on the steps. The girls looked up at them. Woodford paused; then, with a defiant air, sat down beside Anita. She smiled shyly at him, then gazed at the hills.

Graham, with a casual nod, sauntered on into the *plaza*. As he went, he hummed a plaintive little tune which Woodford did not recognize, but which made the younger sister's color deepen. It was a Mexican love song.

Out amid the fallen brush the tall adventurer stood chaffing the grinning toilers and subtly accelerating their work. Juana, chin in hands, sat regarding his indifferent back with unreadable gaze. Woodford toyed absently with cartridges in his belt. Anita continued her dreamy contemplation of the mountains.

None of the trio on the steps said a word. And, for the time, not one of them thought of anything outside their immedi-

ate environment. Sunshine and silent companionship and unbroken peace—these were enough.

CHAPTER IX

A HIDDEN DOOR

THE *PLAZA* was bare. The men who had bared it drowsed in well earned siesta. The man who had caused the baring sat at the long table upstairs, gloomily rolling dice.

The action was automatic, the tumble of the dice random, the gray gaze inattentive. The long hand scooped, shook, slid out the casts with mechanical precision. The brain behind the impassive face was poring over a blind puzzle.

At the far end of the board sat a shorter man, and beside him a much shorter girl. They drew elaborate figures with finger tips on the dusty wood, spoke occasionally, glanced at each other fleetingly, and gave no attention to the monotonous rattles and clicks of the distant cubes. Perched on the table beside the absent minded dicer was a tall woman, who looked alternately at the somber countenance and at the useless results of his motions. At length she lightly remarked—

"So, Señor Gambler, you have not yet found your treasure?"

Graham's head snapped up. For a second he stared. Then his pupils contracted defensively.

"Pardon me. I'd forgotten that you were here," he bluntly admitted. "In fact, you weren't here the last time I looked at you. You were strolling around. But what's that about a treasure?"

The dark blue eyes laughed at him.

"The lost treasure of the lost silver mine of the lost valley—El Valle Perdido. Isn't this that valley?"

The gray eyes shrank still more.

"What makes you think so?"

"My father is manager of a mining company, sir, and has lived in this country many years, and heard many things, and told me a few. And other people have told me other things. And this is the Lost Valley. And you're here to find the mine. And you've missed it. And you don't know what to do next. Don't you wish you did?"

She laughed again, taunting him with voice and gaze.

"If all this were true, I would," he parried. "But what's the story of your Lost Valley?"

"You know. And so do I. And you have been up in the belfry with your field glasses, and had the brush cut down, and used the glasses again from the steps, and found nothing. And now you sit throwing dice and asking yourself, 'Where do we go from here?' And perhaps, Señor Gambler, the answer is directly before you, but you can not see it."

A long pause, while penetrating gazes interlocked.

"Girl, you're either a witch or a clever bluffer," declared Graham. "Maybe both. And maybe you're a bit of a gambler yourself."

"Maybe."

"Yes? Well, then show your hand, if you're playing square. If you're not—Bluffs don't go."

Another light laugh, another fencing of eyes. Then she slid lithely off the table edge.

"Here is my hand, sir." Her tapering fingers rested an instant beside the dice, drew elusively away. "It may hold fortune or misfortune—I don't know which. Read it if you can."

With a slight toss of the head she sauntered away toward the absorbed couple at the other end. Graham's gaze dwelt on her, half smiling, half frowning.

"Jove, what a figure she has!" he thought. "And what a queenly poise, and— Humph! Snap out of it! There's a riddle here. What is it?"

His gaze fell to the dice, and to the faint lines left on the board by the evasive fingers. Two tens, nine, queen, king; a poor cast. His hand moved involuntarily to sweep it up—then halted. The five white squares lay in an irregular wedge formation, the apex pointing

diagonally across the table. The finger marks ran in the same direction.

Brow creased with concentration, he studied a dimly seen enigma, gave it up and looked again at Juana. She had strolled the length of the room and back, and now stood near.

"I'm not fond of picayune puzzles," he declared bruskly. "A big one, yes. A petty one, no. What's your answer, if any?"

Her arched brows drew down in resentment of his cavalier tone. Then her reply came coolly.

"I have sometimes told fortunes with cards, señor. I am not a dicer. But I have noticed something about the falls of your dice which seems to have escaped you. You have thrown them at random, but they have repeatedly taken the same formation and pointed the same way. They point that way now."

Graham started.

"*Válgame Dios!*" he muttered. "I wonder—"

He sighted along the wedge, then sat back and drummed the board with his nails. The angle pointed only to a blank portion of the wall.

JUANA held her tongue, watching variations of his expression. Presently he drew from a pocket a small compass, which he laid at the apex of the dice. When the needle ceased trembling he said dryly:

"West by south. And that means nothing."

"No?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Well, because—"

He halted, smiled suddenly, arose.

"Take the chair," he invited. "And pardon my discourtesy."

"I'm very comfortable standing. And you're just stalling. Go on. You were saying, 'Because—' "

"Oh, well, then, let's both sit on the table. There, that's fine. And now I'll conceal nothing from you. You're right. I'm here to find that mine. The entrance of that mine is covered, but the spot where it lies is supposed to be visible from the door. And nothing west by south from this church is visible from the door. The radius from that door is southwest to southeast. Anything north of those points is out of my picture. So that's that."

Juana gazed pensively at the toes of her stirrup chafed shoes. All at once she looked up.

"Visible from the door," she echoed. "What door?"

"Why, the big door, of course. The main entrance."

"Are you sure?"

He regarded her sidewise. On her curving lips rested an impish smile.

"Say! Just what do you know about that mine, anyway?" He faced her squarely.

"Don't you wish you knew?" she teased. But then, as his mouth tightened with annoyance, she became contrite.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Graham. This is no time for silly joking. The truth is that I know no more about the lost mine than you do, if as much. I know some legends about this valley and this church, but I never heard just where the mine was supposed to lie, nor even that it was visible from a door. But you haven't found it from the main door, I know. So I'm just guessing. Mightn't there be some other door?"

A brief pause, while Graham's face brightened, then clouded.

"Of course there are other doors," he admitted. "But they're small and blocked up. And this church was built with money and labor furnished by the mine operators, so it's reasonable to suppose that it would face the origin of its creation. As for the information about that door, it came from a dying priest, and his last words were, '*Se ve de la puerta.*' "*

"*Sí?*" The girl changed to Spanish unconsciously. " '*La puerta*'—and then he was gone? And might not his next words have been '*al lado derecha*'—to the right side—or '*al oeste*'—at the west—or, yes,

*It is seen from the door.

even *'cerrada'*—secret? A secret door? *Quién sabe?*"

The gray eyes widened.

"*Caramba!* Señorita, you may be a witch, or you may not. But I'll gamble a few minutes of otherwise worthless time in following your lead."

He sprang off the table, strode to a large canvas bag lying against an inner wall, rummaged in it, brought out a ball of cord and tied to the end his pocket knife. Then he returned, sighted along the needle of the compass, located the rifle slit nearest to the indicated direction and went to it. Through the opening he paid out the weighted string until it grew lax. Dropping the shrunken ball on the floor, he marched back.

"What's the excitement?" asked Woodford.

"None. Sit tight. I'm fishing."

He picked up his binoculars and compass and disappeared down the stairs. Woodford half rose, hesitated, sank back, resumed fitful conversation. At the other end of the table Juana sat looking toward the arched doorway where Graham had vanished.

Presently she picked up the dice, shook them with amateurish motions, spilled them on the wood. Nine times she threw them, gaining speed with practise, memorizing each cast. Then she smiled at the vacant chair. By some chance, six of the nine throws had fallen with a king nearest that chair and a queen close behind the king.

Outside the sun beaten walls Graham walked along until he found the cord and its weight. There he scanned the stone pile with growing frown. The grim rock blocks towered high, unbroken by any door.

"Humph! Nothing doing!" he muttered. "However, let's take a look abroad, just to make the thing complete."

He laid the compass on the earth, sighted his glasses, gazed. The lenses moved slowly back and forth, stopped, remained fixed. At length they sank. He stooped again over the compass, looked again at the brown acclivities, turned back to the pendent cord, stared at the spot where it met the soil.

"Well, I'm damned!" he whispered.

Partly concealed by a gradual upcurve of the ground, an oblong block of stone somewhat longer than the others, somewhat different at the corners, lay almost unnoticeable.

Now that the gray eyes of the American dwelt on it, it began to resemble the lintel of a door; a low door long buried beneath a craftily constructed mound which seemed but a natural swell in the earth surface.

Despite the gradually eroding rains of many centuries, it still was but half risen from the hard packed gravel which had masked it completely, and still was virtually indistinguishable from the myriad rectangles which flanked and topped it.

Wheeling, he leveled his glasses again. His eyes traveled up a long, irregular belt of trees which, on an otherwise barren mountainside, mushroomed out into an unkempt forest.

"Yes, they certainly did cover things up," he murmured.

Then he spun to his left and started toward the main entrance. But in midstride he halted, to cast a glance up the cord and smile.

"Thanks, witch!" he called into the mystery of the night.

No answer fell from above. Apparently no ear had heard. But up in the tower the "witch", standing at a narrow aperture, smiled out at the hills.

He strode back to the nave, touched a shoulder of the somnolent Pancho and quietly prompted:

"Come on. We are going for a little ride."

Pancho sat up, stretched, grasped his own rifle and that of Hilario, arose, and walked out. Hilario and Lorenzo and Miguel, apparently comatose, each watched from under one half raised lid, let it droop, dozed again. A few minutes later, hoofs of two horses clattered on cobbles and died out, leaving silence and sleep keepers of the place.

CHAPTER X

DISCOVERY

"THIS, señor, was once a road," declared Pancho.

The two horsemen were well up along the rambling belt of verdure, steadily climbing to the forest at its top. The tall trees and the dense undergrowth were luxuriantly green, fed by water which seeped unseen among their roots. The pair riding in the open ground at the edge could discern scant sign of any handiwork of man within its shadows. Yet the Mexican was positive.

"An old road," he continued. "A road always bordered by brooks and screened by trees, and quickly overgrown when it was abandoned. Look there, señor! See those cobbles!"

He reined in, pointing. Graham perceived rounded stones bared by some freshet of the latest rainy season; stones not likely to have taken their present formation or combination by mere chance.

"*Sí*," he assented. "*Vamonos*. Let's go."

They rode on, Pancho's usually expressionless face alight with anticipative eagerness. At length they reached the broad forest where the wavering green line terminated. The Mexican drew rein again, seeking a way into the unkempt growth. The American rode on.

"*Vamonos*," he repeated.

Pancho followed, silent. They skirted the woods, reached their crest and stopped. For several minutes they sat without speaking.

At one side towered the forest, lush and vigorous. At the other hand rose steep, arid land bare of any growth but cactus. The springs feeding the brooks flowed from some bush masked source at the right. At the left, some distance up, was a shallowly sunken spot, a mere dimple in the wide mountainside. Above that spot was a low cliff.

"That's it!" suddenly asserted Graham. "See what they did, Pancho? They blocked the mouth, blew up the ground above, let it slide. Everything was covered. The rains have gradually beaten in the old hole, but not far. The woods below are fed by drainage, and grew fast. By the time people came back into this valley nobody could see this place."

"*Sí, señor!* The *padres* knew what they were about. They always do," solemnly asserted Pancho. Then, face crinkling, "And now I think we pilgrims are about to become rich! *Sí? No?*"

"*Sí, hombre!*" exulted Graham. His eyes shone, his teeth flashed, his right hand rose and smote the outlaw mightily on a shoulder. And that fighter, who never before had let any man strike him and live to tell of it, took the buffet with a jovial laugh.

For a moment they sat gloating on their find, as sure of success as if they could see through the crust of earth. Obviously, if that shallow cavity were merely a worthless natural formation the ancient road to it would never have been built.

"But how, señor, did you find this place so suddenly?" quizzed Pancho. "All this forenoon we labored in the *plaza*, and you found nothing when we were done. And now you lead me here . . . Did you throw your lucky dice again?"

"*Sí*. But, to speak truth, I failed to read them. The tall lady, Señorita Juana, whom I won with those dice yesterday, showed me their meaning."

The Mexican gazed reflectively at his horse's ears.

"In some few women is much luck," he ventured. "Most of them lead men only to penury and misery. If by chance a lucky one is found, it is wise to take her quickly and keep her. I once had one such, but did not know enough to appreciate— But pardon me, señor. I seem to be talking in my sleep. Shall I go and get a little dynamite?"

A momentary pause. Then Graham replied:

"Your ideas are quite good, *compañero*. Do that. I'll wait here."

"*Muy bien*."

Pancho wheeled his animal and trotted off. Graham sat still, studying anew the woods, the barrens and the sunken spot.

Then he swung his horse and rode back beyond the mushroom of verdure. There he stopped. And there, giving no attention to the diminishing shape of his henchman, he gazed at the distant church. After awhile he said—

"Yes, Pancho, you have a lot of good sense."

CHAPTER XI

THE TREASURE

BOOM!

A thunderous concussion smashed the silence of the hills.

High up one of those hills, earth flew wild. Down in a valley enclosed by hitherto soundless heights, three swarthy men and three white people sprang from dreamless drowse or waking dreams to listen.

Minutes passed. Then—

BOOM!

The noise not only filled the mountain bowl but rolled far beyond its rim. Miles off, people unseen by those of the valley halted motion and broke into conjectural converse. Down in the church the listeners turned to weapons and horses. Up at the scene of the explosions, a white and a brown man emerged from protective forest and critically scanned a ragged orifice, backed by blackness, whence gushed dirty water.

"That will do," judged the white one. "Let the water run off. *Dios*, they certainly sealed it! Have a smoke?"

"*Mucho gusto*," accepted the brown one.

They lounged and puffed. At length Pancho remarked:

"*Sí*, they sealed it tight. The wet season is long past, but the place still is full, in spite of the drains. The lower workings must be entirely drowned."

"What do we care about them?"

"Not much, if the bars are piled within reach. Shall we go and see, señor? There is not so much water now."

"All right."

They advanced; then halted. From somewhere downhill sounded a thudding of hoofs. They stepped back into cover and picked up rifles.

"It may be the boys," murmured Pancho. "But if not—"

They waited. The riders came on around the trees and stopped. The men in ambush peered, relaxed, stepped forth. The unbidden visitors were the entire party from the church, headed by Woodford and Juana, terminated by Anita.

Graham gazed with a twinkle at the girls. Juana, hatless, erect, eager, bestrode a horse and carried a rifle owned yesterday by some bandit. Anita, similarly mounted and armed, looked determined, yet laggard. The one was recklessly ready for anything, the other plucky but cautious. As for Woodford, his face was hard set and his gun up.

"Why all the hot riding?" greeted Graham. "Has anything happened?"

"Why all the noise up here?" countered Woodford. "It sounded like cannon. What's going on?"

"Why, nothing much. We're just amusing ourselves, testing the dynamite."

"Well, why couldn't you tell somebody about it beforehand? With that bandit army somewhere outside and heavy shots breaking out, what were we to—"

"Oh, you've found the mine!"

Juana's exultant voice cut across his plaint. Her quick eyes had found the wet streak on the ground and the ragged hole in the hillside. Woodford stared.

"Jove, I believe you have, Doug!" he marveled. "Is this it? Really it?"

"Well, we sort of think so. I'll take a look and find out."

He advanced to the gloomy aperture. Woodford and Juana swiftly dismounted to follow him. But he turned forbiddingly.

"You'll stay out," he asserted.

"Why?" rebelled Juana.

"Because we've knocked things a bit loose here, and something might drop. In which case you'd be much more useful out here than in there."

They eyed the rough edged hole, in which splintered stones showed like snaggy, menacing teeth. The first explosion had blown hard packed soil away

from a wall of rock blocks; the second had smashed through that buried barrier. Now ponderous weights partly dislodged, yet still held pendent, hung overhead as if ready to fall at the slightest tremor.

"Say, don't go in there yet, Doug," remonstrated Woodford. "Let the men bring up tools and make it safe."

"Nope."

GRAHAM handed his rifle to Pancho, muttered a word or two, walked into the cavern. Woodford took two steps forward, slowed, stopped. Pancho stood in his way, mouth smiling, but gaze chilly. It was plain that El Señor had told him to keep every one back and that the order would be obeyed.

The younger man flushed angrily. So did Juana. But then she said:

"He is right. We must wait."

Inside the ancient tunnel, Graham walked warily on wet, slimy stone, lighting matches, wishing for his electric torch, which lay useless in the church. As yet, there was no danger of going astray, for the passage was straight and narrow; so narrow that his wide shoulders rubbed the walls on either side. But the matches gave out only feeble flares and quickly expired in the dampness. And the wet old hole might possibly hold burrowing snakes.

Step by step he advanced, watching overhead, underfoot, but seldom glancing sidewise. Then suddenly he halted, staring at the hitherto ignored walls.

"Say, you blind mole," he muttered, "if this is a mine mouth, isn't it horribly narrow? And, if so, why?"

He peered at the black walls, then at his upper shirt sleeves, also blackened by friction. His latest match went out. He struck another, held it aloft, dropped it when its light vanished. Then he drew out a pocket knife and scraped a blade repeatedly on the invisible stone. For minutes he worked in the dark, pausing at intervals to feel with finger tips, resuming his labor with increasing fervor. At length he put away the knife, wiped his hands dry on trouser legs, got out his match box and ignited one more sliver of fire.

Out from the gloom shone a bright rectangle. The stone was not stone. The smooth blackness was slime deposited by long choked waters. The wall was composed of blocks of pure silver, piled like the *adobe* bricks of any poor Mexican dwelling. The constricted passage was merely the exit of the workers who had laid up the treasure, concealed the entrance, and gone to unknown deaths.

The match died. The man who held it stared at nothing and rubbed his brow as if dazed. Pure silver, piled solidly on both sides, extending to unguessable height and distance . . .

"*Dios mío!*" he muttered. "I thought we might find a few thousand pesos to start operations. But this must run into hundreds of thousands! Man, what a strike!"

Faint reverberations crept back from some hollow space beyond. He glanced toward the source of the echoes. Then he coughed.

The echo responded promptly. He nodded.

"This is about the end of it," he thought. "But it's plenty. Yes, almost too much. And— Well, now what?"

His pupils narrowed, and for several minutes he studied something invisible to physical sense. Then he walked back to the entrance.

Emerging, he took a gun from the slightly tardy hand of Pancho, answered the intent gaze of the brown man with a dispirited shrug, and stalked on to the woods where his horse was tethered.

As he went, the hitherto motionless mount of one of the silent Mexicans stamped hard on the ground. At once a small but heavy avalanche of rocks and soil slid with a brief, grim roar, nearly obliterating the work of the dynamite.

Pancho leaped nimbly forward to safety. Graham glanced back toward the harsh rumble and shrugged again. Woodford, Juana and Anita drew quick breaths. The three subordinate Mexicans, watch-

ful of all, turned their horses, heading back toward the valley.

"*Nada*," muttered one of them. "Nothing."

Then, in straggling file, all rode soberly down the mountainside. But, as they descended, both Pancho and Juana cast odd glances at Graham, who came last. If he noticed their covert looks he gave no response. While his mount picked its footing he gazed thoughtfully over the hills and far away.

CHAPTER XII

BY MOONLIGHT

AGAIN moonlight shone into the tower. Again bats wheeled on noiseless wings. Again the two Americans lay on the long table, the two sisters in hammocks. But none of the four slept.

In their bedroom the girls whispered. In the big refectory the men kept silence, yet remained awake. At length Graham sat up, swung his legs over the edge, turned to regard his partner. And at once that partner arose to confront him.

"Not tonight, Doug," he said.

"Meaning?" queried Doug.

"Meaning that you're playing double. Last night you got rid of that buzzard gang somehow and took all their horses and guns. Today you did something else that looked queer. The truth is, you and your Mexicans—or Pancho, anyway—are putting something over. I was tired last night, and rather slow today, but I've caught up. And from now on I'm right on your heels."

Graham's teeth gleamed.

"All right, old sleuth. Dog me to my doom, if you will. Now that you've caught me red handed, I'll confess that I was just going down to conspire again with Pancho."

"About what?"

"Well, if you will wring the inmost secrets from my black heart, Sherlock, it's this way: I've been doublecrossing you and the rest of our little crowd. I've found the treasure and, thus far, kept it all to my selfish self. The reason—"

"What!" shouted Woodford. "It's there? In that hole?"

"Pipe down, Hal, pipe down. Your unseemly noise might disturb our boarders."

Hal sprang off the board, seized his partner by the shoulders.

"Doug, quit kidding!" he implored. "Did you really find—"

"I really did. Now unhand me, varlet, before I smite you on the beezer. I don't like anybody shaking me around. I'm sort of funny that way. Sit down!"

Strong hands closed on Woodford's forearms, iron fingers sank into his muscles. He let go, but did not sit. Excitedly he scanned the half smiling, half resolute face of the man who had brought him there.

"Now here comes all the dirt," resumed Graham. "As I was about to say, the reason why I've kept mum is that I don't know just what to do next. The stuff is there, and it's so big that we six men can't handle it. That is, we can't carry it to a place where we can cash it in. Neither can we take out any part of it just now. If things were quiet we might freight out some of it and bring back a gang and a burro train to move the rest. But things aren't quiet. In fact, there's a big revolt against this new Mexican president, Portes Gil. I got wind of it at that last town where we stopped. It was just due to break then, and it's going on now. How it's going I don't know. But it's a safe bet that this is no time to try to move treasure, or even to let anybody know that we've got it.

"At a time like this big bandit gangs are always on the loose, seeking what they may devour. For instance, that Zinzimeo outfit, which sacked the town where the girls lived. There are plenty of other buzzard flocks flying wide and free. So the less anybody knows about us, the better. And, to carry it further, the less some of us know about the silver the better. Pancho's a square shooter, but I'm not so sure about the other three. All men are human, and just now I'd rather not tempt them too far.

"So I just walked out of that hole and pretended that I'd found nothing. I figured that the stuff was safe while nobody knew it was there. And I wanted to plan the next move. But I haven't found it yet, because I don't know what's going on outside these mountains. And I noticed Pancho giving me a fishy eye as we came down. And he's a very sagacious bird. He suspects something. And it would be just like him to go riding again tonight and dig into that hole to see what was there. And if he decided that I was doublecrossing him—

"Well, you were speaking of the disappearance of those Zinzimeo *zopilotes*. They went for a ride, all right, but not quite as I told you. Pancho and his pals slipped out last night, shot them all, slung them over their own horses, carried them miles north, and blew down a hill on them. They did that just because they disliked those birds. If they should take a dislike to us, too, we'd be completely out of luck. So I thought I'd stroll downstairs now and talk a bit to Pancho."

He slid off the table edge. The listener shot a glance toward the black stair well, another toward the door beyond which rested the sisters.

"Apologies, Doug!" he said hurriedly. "Come on! I'm with you!"

"No, you're not. I'll go alone. I know my Mexicans better than you do. You stick here! So long."

GRAHAM went without further words, carrying his flashlight. Its radiance shone on bleak stone walls, faded down the spiral, died from view. Woodford listened, but heard no voices. Any conversation which ensued downstairs was too subdued to creep to the upper levels.

The lone man fidgeted, picked up his rifle, laid it down. The silence seemed sepulchral. Then a faint creak drew his roving gaze to the door which sheltered Juana and Anita. It had stood slightly ajar. Now it was opening.

"Don't shoot, señor," said a tranquil voice. "I'm not dangerous."

And into a moonbeam walked Juana.

"I've been listening," she confessed, advancing. "Not a nice thing to do, perhaps, but quite natural when one is aroused by an outcry. It was you, wasn't it, who shouted so suddenly?"

"Yes," he admitted. "Sorry I scared you."

She laughed lightly and perched beside him.

"I'm not afraid now—with you," she confided. "But that's not the point. I overheard everything after you got me up. And, in a nutshell, Mr. Graham has found the mine and doesn't know what to do about it. Is there anything more?"

"If there is I don't know it, Jua—I mean Miss—"

"Juana is right," she interrupted. "What's the use of formalities when people are in our position? Let's be frank, Hal. Somehow I feel that I can be more frank with you than with Mr. Graham. You're all American, and outspoken. He's—well, rather Spanish and evasive. I can be quite Spanish too, but— Oh, let's talk turkey, as my dad says."

"All right, Juana," he laughed. "You're certainly all American now. And, as one Yank to another, I'll just say that you know all I know about the silver, and maybe more. And that covers the whole ground."

She regarded him sidelong, nodded, glanced away. After a meditative moment she murmured:

"All right. I'll go back to bed. But when Mr. Graham returns you might ask him if he ever heard the legend of the bells."

"What bells?"

"The old bells in the belfry here. The bells of El Valle Perdido."

"What's the legend?"

"That when the *padres* left this valley they commanded the bells to remain silent; and they've never rung since then. When they do ring once more the days of violence and crime here will be ended, and the lost mine will be worked again, and peace and prosperity will rule. A quaint story, isn't it?"

"Rather. But what has that to do with our moving the silver?"

"I don't know. But it might have something to do with your not moving it. All the Indians in these mountains firmly believe in that tradition, and—"

"Indians? Are there Indians around here?"

"Yes, quite a number of them. They live in their own little settlements, hidden away among the hills, and avoid white people. And, in their queer way, they worship this church and wait for the fulfillment of the prophecy. And they're quite fierce when aroused, and if they should happen to see men who didn't conform to the prediction carrying away silver they might become excited and do things."

He chilled. He had heard of the atrocities perpetrated on enemies by the Yaquis, up at the north, and could vividly imagine the vengeance of local fanatics on looters of the sacred hoard.

"Not many people know of this," she added. "Perhaps Mr. Graham doesn't, either. You might ask him. And now good night."

With a light pat on the knee, she slipped off the wood.

"Wait a minute! How did you learn all this, if you've never been here before?"

"I heard it all from an Indian servant of ours, who came from this region. She eloped years ago, with some young bandit. He deserted her, of course, and she drifted to us and stayed. She could never go back to her own people, because they would kill her for running off with a half white man. They're really quite unpleasant to people who offend them, it seems."

"Yes, it would seem so. Well—er—thanks awfully for telling me."

"All right. By-by."

She walked away. Impulsively he called—

"Say, Juana!"

"Yes?" She paused.

"Er—I—well, while we're being American I just want to say that I think you're a damn' good sport!"

She did not laugh at him. Her eyes smiled, but her reply was as directly sincere as his declaration.

"Now you're talking just like my father, Hal. And I think the same about you. And I'm not the only one who thinks so."

With that she disappeared into the corridor and closed the door. The faint bump announced that she would do no more eavesdropping.

Woodford sat in a warm glow. For once, he knew more than his far traveled, long experienced partner. And, for the first time in his browbeaten life, a marvelous girl believed in him. Yes, two marvelous girls, both at once. They knew nothing about his family; they were not playing for the Woodford wealth; they believed in *him!* Beside that fact, the temporary thrill of finding himself a sharer in buried treasure was as nothing.

Happily he lighted a cigaret and blew smoke at the emptiness. Before it burned down, the electric light came back up the stairway.

"Still sitting up?" asked Graham.

"Oh, yes. Thought I'd wait and see how you came out."

"Well, there's nothing to report, except that Pancho won't go riding tonight, and we'll all go riding tomorrow."

"Where to?"

"Back the way we came. We'll get the girls to some safe place, learn all the latest news, and shape our further plans accordingly. Meanwhile, the silver lies in its hole."

He snapped off his light and lay down, evidently dispirited. Woodford tossed away his glowing stub and remarked—

"That sounds sensible."

He, too, stretched out. Minutes crawled away. Then, as if merely to break the silence, he asked—

"Say, Doug, what's the whole story of these bells up overhead?"

"Bells? These bells? Why, they're just bells. Old, of course. But Mexico's full of old bells."

"Uh-huh. Well, what about the Indians around here?"

"Humph! If there are any they're not worth talking about. Sodden wrecks, probably, full of *pulque* and fleas."

"Oh, yes? Well, now, I heard differently. I heard . . ."

Lazily he told what he had heard, without revealing the source of information. His bedmate listened intently.

"Say, Hal, where did you get that?" he demanded.

"Oh, it came to me somewhere between here and Mexico City. I just happened to think of it. Is there anything in it?"

Graham lay contemplating a high window. At length he replied:

"There may be a good deal in it. Just what, I don't know yet. But it will bear considerable consideration."

"Uh-huh. Well, good night."

Woodford yawned, winked at a circling bat, shut his eyes and, after a time, drifted into slumber.

Silence again ruled. Down below, Pancho, with budding distrust allayed, slept peacefully beside his unsuspicious followers. Behind the closed door Juana and Anita lay in restful oblivion. On the table a man hitherto burdened by an inferiority complex smiled in self-confident dreams Beside him another man fixedly stared at a moon ray, groping for light on the dim pathway of tomorrow, not quite achieving it. At last he, too, sank into a world of unrealities. And in that phantasmal region he heard, for no logical reason, a recurrent tolling of cathedral bells.

CHAPTER XIII

BELLS

MORNING again flooded the valley. And again two men rose from the blackness of the *campanario* to stand in the shadowy bell room.

For a moment they rested, regaining breath after their long climb. Meanwhile their eyes dwelt on the green bells high overhead, whose cavernous mouths were full of gloom.

"I'm just inquisitive enough," then remarked Graham, "to wonder what's the secret of silence up here. The bell ropes are gone, and probably were carried off by the *padres*. But some of the earthquakes since then must have rocked this tower enough to make the bells swing and ring. And that would spoil the priestly prophecy."

They peered more narrowly, pupils contracted by dazzling shafts of sunlight shooting through the narrow arches. The bells, hanging in dense shade under a domed roof, gaped inscrutably.

"The priests fastened them somehow," vaguely explained Woodford.

His gaze swung out to the mountains. His hands lifted Graham's field glasses and focused them.

"Or perhaps," he jested, "they gave them the same delicate treatment the old sultans gave their personal servants to keep them from blabbing."

He swung the binoculars slowly along the polls of the bald giants. Graham's eyes sharpened.

"Cut their tongues out? Man, I believe you've said something! Give me those glasses!"

He sank to the floor, lay supine in the shade, trained the lenses upward. After a brief interval he laughed.

"Yes, old sleuth, you did say something," he announced. "That's exactly what they did. They took the clappers out of the bells! Ha-ha-ha-ha! Those old boys were clever!"

He lay chuckling. Woodford, staring upward, soon nodded. So dark were the hollow mouths that the absence of their tongues was almost imperceptible to the unaided human eye. And few human eyes, if any, had been up here since the abandonment of the church. The superstitious Indians round about would never ascend the ghostly stairway. Bandits who might retreat here would not be interested in bells. Nobody else would be likely even to enter the hidden valley. Yes, the vanished *padres* had been clever.

Graham arose, still smiling at the simplicity of it all.

"Well, all that's necessary now is to

ring these dumb bells," he jested, "and forthwith the mine will work itself and this uninhabited valley will leap to life and there'll be peace on earth, good will to men. Isn't that the story?"

"How would you ring bells without ropes or tongues?"

"Easy enough. They'd ring far and wide if we shot a few bullets at them."

Woodford's brows drew down.

"I wouldn't do that, Doug," he objected. "I've no religion, but— Well, I wouldn't do that."

Graham eyed him quizzically, then sobered and glanced around the rugged horizon.

"Neither would I, Hal," he admitted. "I've no religion either, but I don't shoot at church bells. It's not exactly decent. And besides, there's apt to be an awful lot behind these simple mysteries of the old priests. One thing leads to another down in these mysterious countries, and you have to be careful not to start something you can't finish. I've seen some weird things come about. And this is— a rather queer sort of place . . ."

His voice trailed off. His roving eyes had come to rest on something outside. Suddenly he lifted the binoculars again. For a long moment he stood very still.

"Speaking of things coming about," he drawled then, "something's coming our way right now. And I don't like its looks."

"Where? What? Indians?"

"Nope. Not Indians. Look northwest."

Woodford peered intently, shading his eyes with his hands. On a bare mountainside, perhaps two miles away, he discerned a straggling column of tiny figures moving diagonally down. They progressed slowly, picking their way along some difficult trail which, perhaps, was partly obliterated. But their advance was grimly persistent. In the clear air it was evident that they were horsemen. And they were many.

"More than a hundred of them, I'd say," judged Graham. "And a tough bunch. You can tell that by the way they ride. Something tells me that it's the Zinzimeo outfit. Pancho blocked their road while he was taking the air, but they've found another way in. And they don't believe the landslide was just an accident, and they want to know who's here. That's the way I read it. Yes, we're in for something, Hal. Here, take a good look."

TO BE CONCLUDED

WHO KNOWS ?

A Tale of the San Joaquin Valley

By BILL ADAMS

CULLY DALE—I always thought there must be a drop of Indian blood in him. I don't know just why. Perhaps it was that there was a sort of far off, dreamy look to him at times. He did not talk much; not as much as the rest of us at any rate. When he did speak it was sometimes in a sharp impatient voice. But usually his accents were soft and languorous; the sort of voice you might expect from a Gypsy.

Cully Dale had the appearance of a disconsolate beanpole when you watched him go dawdling down the street. He was tall and very lean. His shoulders stooped a little, as though at twenty-five he were already too tired to carry himself erect. Perhaps he was born tired. He was the laziest lad in town.

Cully Dale had a pair of the brownest eyes I ever saw. They were very bright eyes. When he looked at you in the laughing, mocking way he sometimes had, you wondered just what was in the mind behind them.

Cully's hair was jet black. His chin was sharp. His cheekbones were prominent. His fingers were long. His lips were thin, and usually there was a cigaret between them.

When first I saw Cully Dale he was working on the grader in an orange packing house. That is the easiest job there is

in an orange packing house. You sit on a stool all day and watch the fruit as it rolls along on the canvas conveyor before you. Cully's job was to pick out the scarred fruit. Any one could do that. A twelve year old boy could do it.

It was well along into the summer when the packing house closed down. Cully had been working for almost two months. A day later he was flat broke. He had lost all his money at poker.

As soon as the packing house closed down the packers, box makers, graders, truckers and loaders left town to find jobs in the plum and apricot and peach country farther up the San Joaquin valley. Cully did not leave town. He loafed round the pool hall and ran up a bill for his meals at Dad Moore's little lunch counter down at the foot of the street. He slept in a shack on the alley at the back of Dad's place. Dad was a good natured old man, and a shark at poker and at shooting craps.

It was the summer of 1917. Even in the sleepy valley of the San Joaquin things were beginning to get quite tense. The fruit tramps—though they never take any interest to speak of in what goes on outside their own world of fruit crops and packing houses—were beginning to feel a little apprehensive. Now and again you would hear the word "draft". Cully Dale and Sid Barton were about the only ones who took no interest at all in the war.

Sid Barton was a socialist. He was the only socialist that ever I saw who did not have dyspepsia, or a sour stomach, or something of that sort. He was a solidly built, aggressive looking man of about twenty-seven. He had big muscles, pugnacious bulging eyes and a sneering sort of voice. He was a car loader. Car loaders usually make more money than any one else in a packing house and, after the fashion of fruit tramps in general, they usually spend it freely—craps, or poker, or maybe putting up bail money or paying a fine for some pal or another who has got himself into trouble with the law. But there was nothing of the gambler about Barton. If ever he chipped in to help pay the fine for some fellow packing house worker who had been pinched for gambling, or for getting a bit lit up, I never heard of it.

One day just before the packing house closed down, one of the packers asked Barton what he thought of the likelihood of an Army draft. Barton wiped the sweat from his forehead and replied:

"Draft hell! They can't draft me. This is a free country."

The grader had stopped for a few minutes while one of the conveyors was being fixed. Cully had left his stool and was sitting on the edge of the loading platform, smoking a cigaret and rolling his dice. At Barton's words he glanced up.

"Aw, forget it," he drawled, and went on rolling his dice.

THE DAY after the packing house closed I met the foreman of the fumigating crew. I'd worked for him, pulling tents the previous summer, and he asked me if I wanted my job back. I didn't exactly want it. But you can make pretty good wages at fumigating, so I told him that I'd pull tents for him again.

You have to be pretty tough if you're going to be a fumigator, or else you have to be pretty hard up for a job. The gray scale insect that lives on the sap of the orange trees and spoils their productivity is a hard little customer to get rid of. The only way to be effectually rid of him is by fumigating the trees with a very deadly gas formed by the mixture of sulphuric acid and cyanide solution. You cover each tree with a heavy canvas, shoot the gas in under the canvas and leave the trees covered for a full fifty minutes. If you move the canvas in less than fifty minutes enough mature insects will survive quickly to infest the tree again; for one female hatches as many as four hundred young at a time.

The foreman of the fumigating crew was a sun baked sort of fellow of about thirty-five years of age. He'd lived in the

San Joaquin valley all his life, and had a kid just old enough to be crawling about on all fours. I'll call him Billy Smith, and then if he sees this and wants to punch my head for saying that he looked like a horned toad without the spikes, I'll have an alibi and be able to swear that it wasn't him I was meaning.

The San Joaquin is the natural home of the horned toad. The temperature sometimes goes as high as 115° in the shade. The air will be so still that a spider's web won't float on it, but will hang motionless hour after hour for days at a time. The moment the sun sails up from behind the Sierras you feel as though you were in the middle of a big bake oven with a good fire just starting under it. Hour by hour the sun moves across a cloudless, glaring sky. By ten o'clock you feel as though there wasn't a drop of moisture left anywhere in you.

Most of the well-to-do people get out of the valley and go to the hills or to the coast for the summer. Such few as are unable to get away drink endless iced drinks and wear big shady, perforated hats, and go about in their shirtsleeves, taking things in the easy way that only the well-to-do may.

The men who drive cultivators up and down the orchard rows keep their eyes on the ground and let their mules take it easy. When quitting time comes they sit about on their door steps and don't have much to say. They're too dried out for talk. Of course the temperature doesn't go as high as 115° every day. When the mercury stays at about 95° or so the pallid clerks in the stores of the little towns amid the orange groves say to each other, "Nice cool day, ain't it?"

Fumigating is night work. If you were to fumigate in the daytime the gas would scorch the foliage and ruin the young fruit. Provided the temperature has fallen to 80°, work starts at sundown. If it hasn't fallen, you wait for it to do so. When morning comes the tents must be off the trees before so much as a ray of sunlight can strike them. Did the sun shine on them for even as much as a quarter of a minute the young fruit would be pitted with gas burns.

When I asked Billy who else was going to work on his crew he told me that he'd hired Sid Barton for the other tent puller. Buck Kurtz was going to drive the gas machine. But Billy hadn't been able to find a kicker yet.

While we were sipping our iced drinks and trying to think of some one we could get to do the kicking, the city marshal came along the sidewalk with his tin star on his jacket lapel. He was talking to the city nightwatchman, who went on duty at six o'clock. It was a few minutes to six.

As the marshal and nightwatch passed the pool hall the marshal peered into it. After they were gone by I heard him say to the nightwatch:

"That waster Dale's hanging round town doing nothing. If you run across him stick him in the calaboose. I'm going to put a vagrancy charge against him and run him out of town."

A minute or two after the marshal and nightwatch were gone round the street corner Cully Dale came dawdling along the sidewalk. He nodded to me and started into the pool hall.

"There's your kicker, Billy," said I.

"Dale," I called, "Billy's got a job for you, Dale!"

Cully turned and looked at me from bright mocking eyes.

"Who in heck told you I wanted a job?" he drawled.

"All right, if you say so," I said, and just as the nightwatchman reappeared from round the corner of the street I added, "The cops are going to pinch you on a vagrancy charge."

Billy stepped up to Cully and said:

"I'm looking for a kicker for my crew. We'll start work at seven if the temperature's low enough."

Cully glanced at the nightwatch, who was striding up the sidewalk toward us.

"All right," he said.

"You, fellow," said the nightwatchman, coming up to the counter as Billy ordered

a drink for Cully Dale, "what you hanging round town for, eh?"

"Dale's kicking on my fumigating crew," said Billy.

Cully Dale grinned as the nightwatchman went on up the street.

AFTER a minute or two Billy climbed into his rig. Cully and I climbed in after him, and we drove out to the grove we were to start fumigating that night. Kurtz and Barton were already there. Our supplies were set down at the roadside—a big lead lined drum of sulphuric acid, a big tank of cyanide solution and a fifty gallon barrel of water. Kurtz had on his rubber gloves and was loading the gas machine, filling its lead lined chamber with sulphuric and the other chamber with cyanide. While Billy unhitched the mule from his rig and hitched her between the heavy iron shafts of the two wheeled machine, Barton and I started to unroll the tents. There were sixty of them strung out along the roadside; one to each tree. Dale had slumped down on the soft earth by the roadside and was rolling a cigaret.

When Billy noticed Dale doing nothing he sang out—

"Lend a hand with those tents, Dale!"

Cully rose and, with his cigaret between his lips, began leisurely unrolling a tent.

"Chuck that fag away," called Billy. "You'll be burning holes in the tents."

Cully mumbled something to himself and threw his cigaret away. To every three or four tents that Barton or I would unroll he'd unroll one.

"That waster won't last long on a fumigating crew," muttered Barton with a sneer.

When all the tents were unrolled and laid out flat and we were back at the machine again, Billy, who was watching the thermometer, called:

"She's down to eighty. Put 'em on! Let's go!"

Barton and I picked up our sixteen-foot tent poles. Barton took one corner of the first tent and I took another. We laid the corners of the tent over the blunt ends of our poles, took a hitch round poles and canvas with our pole ropes, stuck the sharp ends of the poles into the ground; then we walked backward, pulling as we went. The forty-five foot square canvas rose slowly, came over the top of the tree and, as we threw off our pole ropes, it fell to the ground, leaving the tree completely covered.

"All right, Dale! Kick that tree in and look alive," called Billy.

"What d'ye mean, kick?" languorously asked Cully Dale.

Billy went to the tree and walked round it, tramping the canvas close down to the ground and kicking it well in under the lower limbs. By the time he was done Barton and I had another tree covered.

"All right, Dale. That's the way. Step along now," said Billy.

By the time that Dale had the second tree kicked in Barton and I had three more covered.

All the way along the sixty trees Kurtz kept calling:

"Step along, Billy. I'm right on your tail."

All the way along the row Billy kept calling to Dale to move faster and keep out of his way.

Though kicking is the easiest job on a fumigating crew, it isn't any picnic if there's a fast working machine man coming along behind the foreman and making him hustle with his measuring tape. The instant that Dale had a tree kicked in Billy was stepping round it, measuring its circumference and calling out the dosage of gas to Kurtz. Almost before Billy could get out of his way Kurtz would have the long, wire bound rubber gas hose leading from the bottom of the machine pushed in under the canvas and, as he raised and lowered the mixing lever, we'd hear the hiss of the gas as it shot out under the tent. We had a lively little mule pulling the machine. She stepped from tree to tree the moment Kurtz spoke to her.

"Some little mule, eh, Billy?" called Kurtz.

"We'll all be mules before morning," answered Billy.

By the time that we had the sixty trees all covered fifty-five minutes were gone and it was time to start shifting the tents to the next row.

As soon as we came back to the start Cully Dale slumped breathlessly down at the roadside. By the light of the rising moon I could see the sweat trickling down his dusty face. His shirt was thick with dust and soaked with sweat. We were all of us covered with dust. Billy and Kurtz and I were a bit sweaty. It was the first night of the fumigating season and we were not yet hardened to it.

"All right, boys," called Billy, "time to shift 'em. Let's go!"

"Aw," muttered Cully, "don't a fellow never get no rest?"

Barton sniggered. He was dry as a bone, not a drop of sweat on him.

"If you hustle along on this next row, maybe you'll get ten or fifteen minutes' rest at the end of it, Dale," said Billy.

Cully threw away his cigaret and climbed to his feet.

When Barton and I had covered about twenty trees of the second row I began to feel gas. It'll affect a man sometimes without his having smelled or suspected any leak, and a man who's short of breath will always feel it sooner than another, of course. My legs began to tremble. My heart began to pound. Trying to keep pace with Barton, who was pulling his fastest, I tottered a little as I hurried from tree to tree. I could hear Cully Dale panting close behind me.

"Do you fellows notice any gas?" called Billy presently.

"Not a thing," answered Barton, before I could speak.

I caught a glimpse of Cully's face. It was chalk white. His mouth was wide open. His eyes had a puzzled, glassy look.

At a shout from Kurtz I dropped my pole and ran to the machine. Billy ran to it too. The mule stood with her feet far apart and her head hanging. There wasn't a moment to lose. Unless we could get her out to the clear air, away from the gas that was evidently leaking from one of the dosed tents, she was going to fall down and die in her harness. Kurtz had her unhitched in an instant. While Billy and I beat her flanks he dragged her out to the road.

Until we had the mule safe neither of us gave a thought to Barton or Cully. Just as Billy shouted to ask if they were all right, Barton walked nonchalantly from the grove.

"What's all the fuss?" he asked.

Billy and Kurtz and I dashed back to look for Cully. We found him sitting hunched up with his back to one of the tents and his head between his knees. Billy grabbed the neck of his shirt. Kurtz and I grabbed his arms. Dragging him with us, we ran from the gas laden air of the grove. When we dropped him at the roadside he lay still, with his mouth wide open and his glassy eyes staring unseeing up to the moonlit sky. A moment after Billy had run for water to throw over him he sat up, and we knew that he'd soon be all right. His expression was so perplexed that Kurtz and I laughed. Barton didn't laugh.

"He'll quit now. A man what can't stand the gas no better than him hadn't ought to be on a fumigating crew anyway," sneered Barton.

Cully climbed weakly to his feet. The glassy look was gone from his eyes. Some of the pallor was gone from his dusty, sweat stained face. Turning to Barton, he drawled—

"Who said anything about quitting?"

With a jangle of harness, the mule shook herself. She'd gotten over the effects of the gas, and was all right again.

"All right, boys," said Billy, "let's get back on the job. We've lost fifteen minutes."

Billy found a small hole that a broken limb in a tree top had made in one of the tents. He tied the edges of the torn canvas together, told Kurtz to give the

tree a few extra ounces of gas, and hurried on after the pullers and kicker.

I was still feeling a little weak and could only just manage to keep pace with Barton, who was pulling as fast as ever. Though I knew that he must be feeling a good deal worse than I, Cully managed to keep close after us.

By the time that we came to the end of the row and were back to the start again seventy minutes were gone. Even though we were twenty minutes behind time I thought that Billy would let us take a little rest. But as soon as we came back to the first tree, Barton, without waiting for any word from Billy, said:

"Come on. Let's go!"

I guessed at once what Barton was up to. He wanted to give Cully Dale no respite, wanted to wear him out and force him to quit.

"Let's wait a minute and see what Billy says," I suggested.

As I spoke I caught a glimpse of Cully's face and knew that he too had seen through Barton's words.

While Barton waited unwillingly for Billy to come up Cully Dale squatted on his heels, took out his dice and started to roll them.

"What do you say, boys?" asked Billy. "Got to have a rest?"

"I didn't come out here to sit around," said Barton testily.

"Go to it," retorted Billy; and added, "A guy that can stand the gas as well as you can ought to be over fighting the Germans."

With a scornful look in his eyes Barton stepped up to the first tent. Cully Dale put his dice back in his pocket and rose to his feet.

"This'll be good training for *you*, when they send you over to fight those Germans, Dale," said Billy.

"Aw, forget it," drawled Cully. "They'd have a heck of a time makin' a soldier out o' me."

Billy and Kurtz and I laughed. Barton, who was waiting for me to get my pole rope hitched, sneered—

"That's no lie."

ON THAT third row Barton pulled faster than ever. It was only by my utmost effort that I kept pace with him and, try as he might, Cully Dale fell far behind. But when we were about halfway along the row Barton broke his pole by jerking too hard on it when one of the tents hung. By the time that he had fetched a new pole and shifted his rope to it Cully had caught up and was waiting on us.

"Come on, soldier. We're all waiting on you," drawled Cully.

Muttering, "Soldier hell! They don't get me being no soldier," Barton savagely hauled the tent over its tree.

It was not till a quarter past midnight that we had any chance to rest. At midnight fumigators, unless they've fallen far behind on the job, take a half hour in which to eat and make a pot of coffee. After he'd eaten a few bites and gulped a cup of hot coffee Cully Dale flung himself down and, with his face buried in his arms, fell fast asleep.

"What d'ye think of this here talk of draftin' men to fight them Germans?" asked Kurtz of Billy.

While making no answer for a moment, Billy sat staring into our little fire. Barton moved off and sat down by himself.

"It's getting closer to us every day, or else I miss my guess," said Billy presently.

"We three's got families," said Kurtz. "They'll not take us."

"Suppose they could ever make a soldier out of him?" asked Billy, and nodded toward Cully Dale.

Kurtz grinned.

"If they gets to talking this here draft stuff much more you won't see Dale around. He'll get away and hide hisself some place," he said.

When we had had but fifteen minutes rest Billy called:

"All right, boys. Let's go!"

From after the midnight rest till dawning comes is always a fumigator's hardest time. Hour after hour we worked in silence and had no chance to take another rest. Barton alone was fresh.

Between four and five of the morning the stars began to wink out, and a coolness came to the air. Billy and Kurtz and I came back to life again.

"Step along there, Dale! We're waiting on you," called Billy.

As the thin daylight filtered down the orchard rows I glanced at Cully. His face was bleary, white under its thick dust. But somehow he managed to keep up with us. It must have been by a tremendous effort. When we finished that row we had ten minutes in which to rest.

"How do you like fumigating, Dale?" asked Billy.

Dale made no answer. Outstretched upon the ground, he lighted a cigaret. As though he were all alone, as though unconscious of our presence, he brought his dice from his pocket and began rolling them.

"What you gambling on, Dale?" asked Kurtz. "Whether you'll work with us another night or not?"

"You'll not see Dale kicking no tents tonight. Dale's through," sneered Barton.

Ignoring Barton, Cully Dale looked from one to another of the three of us.

"Who said anythin' about quitting?" he drawled.

At half past five we dragged the tents off the trees, hitched the mule to Billy's rig and drove to town. By six-thirty I'd had a cold bath and eaten my breakfast. By six-thirty-five I was asleep. I awoke at ten. The day was utterly breathless. My thermometer stood at 90° already. I lay down and tried to sleep again. I couldn't. Before noon the temperature was over 100°. From noon till between two and three o'clock the mercury kept climbing. Lying motionless on my bed in the shade of a big mulberry tree, I thought of Cully Dale trying to sleep in the tin roofed, shadeless shanty at the back of old Dad's place.

When I went to the pool hall at a little before seven to wait for Billy I found Cully Dale already there.

"Coming out, Cully?" I asked.

"Sure," he answered.

AFTER a few nights we moved to the Hutchins grove. It was close to the edge of town. From where our supplies were set down we could see some of the town roofs and, here and there, a light that hung above the main street. There was a moon. In the far distance we could see the rim of the Sierras clear cut against the sky.

The railway ran along the edge of the Hutchins grove. Our sulphuric drum, tank of cyanide and fifty gallon barrel of water were set down close to it, between it and the trees some sixty feet away. On the other side of the track was a rough roadway that passed along the back yards at the town's edge.

Because the trees of the Hutchins grove were old and very tall Barton and I had hard work to haul the tents over them. We couldn't make fast time, and Cully and the others were able to keep up with us without effort. Since it was impossible for us to make good wages at piece work, we were now being paid by the hour.

Being paid by the hour suited me and Kurtz and Cully very well, of course. And it especially suited Barton. Sure of making good wages no matter how little we accomplished, he took things easily and made no attempt to hurry. That didn't suit the foreman at all. Billy was a mule for work himself, and he detested a loafer.

Though it made Billy furious to see Barton loafing so deliberately, he didn't say anything to him. Pullers were very hard to find.

As we were walking back to the start together after dosing the first row I said to Kurtz—

"I wish they'd pass the draft law and take that guy Barton."

"Don't you think it," replied Kurtz. "If the draft comes Barton'll find a way of slipping out of it."

When we came back to the start at midnight Billy asked Kurtz if he'd seen an evening paper.

"No," said Kurtz. "What's the latest?"

"They've passed the draft law," replied Billy.

I saw Barton look up with a scowl on his face, but Cully Dale seemed not to hear.

"Hear that, Dale?" asked Kurtz. "They're going to draft some of you birds to fight them Germans."

"Aw, forget it," drawled Cully.

"I can, if you can, I guess," laughed Kurtz.

Because we were so close to town, neither Billy nor Kurtz had brought any lunch with them.

"Come on, Kurtz," said Billy. "Let's you and I go eat at old Dad's place."

"Go ahead," said Kurtz. "Soon as I've got the machine loaded I'll be with you."

While Kurtz started to refill the machine Billy started off toward Dad's place, which was three or four minutes' walk away. When he'd filled up the sulphuric and cyanide chambers Kurtz tossed a handful of hay to the mule and hurried after him.

I was very tired. When I'd finished my meal I crossed the track and sat down on the other side of the rough roadway. While Barton remained seated a little way from the mule, Cully Dale wandered off and sat down under a tree at the edge of the Hutchins grove.

Motionless in the light of the moon, the canvas covered trees resembled great tombstones. Save for now and again a low rustle as the mule munched her hay, there wasn't a sound. Soon the hay was all gone, and she too was still. With her head drooped, she stood fast asleep in the moonlight.

I could see Barton plainly. The moon shone on his face. Seated with his big arms about his knees, he stared from bulging eyes into the silent night, scornfully watching Cully Dale, who, sixty feet away, was rolling his everlasting dice.

While I sat wondering how Cully and Barton would take being drafted, a little breeze sprang up, blowing direct from the Hutchins grove, over the machine and Barton and me, toward the sleeping town at my back.

Suddenly I saw a jackrabbit hop out of the Hutchins grove and sit in the moonlight with its ears pricked up. Cully saw it too, and reached for a clod. I saw him throw it, and saw it burst in a little cloud of dust a few inches behind the rabbit.

Like a gray shadow, the rabbit scurried along the edge of the grove straight toward Cully. Aware of him suddenly, it doubled and, dashing away, shot directly under the nose of the sleeping mule.

As the startled mule reared, Barton leaped to his feet. Alarmed further by his hasty movement, the mule sprang forward and started off up the track with the loaded machine behind her.

"Whoa, mule!" I heard in Cully's drawling voice and, at that instant, the hub of the machine's wheel struck hard against the side of our fifty gallon barrel of water.

As the machine checked and tilted I saw liquid spurt from its top. In his haste to follow Billy, Kurtz had forgotten to screw in the lids. The cyanide and sulphuric chambers were both open.

A moment more and, overbalanced by the uptilted machine, the mule was down, struggling wildly on her side between the iron shafts. *There was enough gas in the machine to kill every sleeper in the town behind me!*

Helpless because frozen with horror, I stood like a fool and stared at the escaping liquid. I subconsciously saw Barton dash madly away past Cully and on into the Hutchins grove, upwind to safety.

Before I could gather my wits Cully Dale had deliberately left his place of safety up the wind and was leaping across the intervening space toward the deadly fumes. About to run for safety myself, I heard his voice calling me. I ran to him.

"Hold that fool mule," he said.

With bare ungloved hands Cully Dale was screwing in the lid of the acid chamber. I saw him wince as the crude acid bit into his flesh. Then, with both

lids in place, he dipped his hand into the water barrel and carefully kicked loose earth over the pool of escaped and smoking acid.

"If the boss was ever to know old Kurtz had gone away and left them lids off him and Billy'd lose their jobs. We got to keep our traps shut," said Cully.

As Barton came back, white faced and shaking, Cully put his burned hand behind his back.

"I thought them lids wasn't in," said Barton.

"You ain't paid to think," said Cully Dale.

Billy and Kurtz ran up.

"A blame' good thing you had the lids screwed in, Kurtz," said Billy when we had the machine righted and the mule quieted down.

"I'll say it was," agreed Kurtz, utterly unaware that he had left them open.

"How's your hand, Cully?" I asked when no one else was near.

"I don't need no hand for kickin' tents," said Cully Dale.

Next morning the papers were full of the draft law. Next night when Kurtz and I met at the pool hall to wait for Billy neither Barton nor Cully Dale were there.

While Billy went off to look for new men I leaned on the counter. Kurtz entered the pool hall and sat down to read the evening paper. He called to me presently. Pointing to the paper, he said:

"Look here! Them two guys didn't need to have gone running off the way they did."

I read the article that Kurtz pointed out to me. It stated that men were wanted for work behind the lines in the Aviation Service. There'd be no flying, and it implied that there would be no danger in the job.

SOME months passed by. In all the talk and turmoil of the war I'd forgotten Sid Barton and Cully Dale. And then one evening when Kurtz and I were talking by the pool hall counter, Sid Barton himself appeared upon the street, in uniform, his chest thrown out and puttees tightly wound about his muscled legs. People who met him on the street all turned to stare. Some stopped and took his hand. I heard a bright eyed girl say—

"Look at the soldier boy!"

The little street was full of pride in Barton. He didn't notice us as he passed by. When he was gone Kurtz grinned to me.

"Remember that piece we saw in the paper that day?" asked Kurtz. "He saw it first, before ever we did."

More months passed by. Summer was long since done, and winter done. The spring was come again. The orange groves hung heavy with white bloom. Bees droned, and all the sunny air was sweet. But in the postoffice great placards stood, calling to those who stayed at home to buy war savings stamps and bonds for liberty. No young men were left in all the little town. Old men worked in the packing houses, and none but women sat upon the grader stools.

One evening after quitting time when Billy and Kurtz and I were strolling past his place old Dad strode from his little lunch room. He held a paper crumpled in his hand. His jaws were set. His eyes were grim.

"What is it, Dad?" asked Billy while the old man glowered at us.

"They've got him—" hoarsely whispered Dad.

"Got who, Dad? What d'ye mean?" I asked.

For a long moment the old man stared at us speechlessly. Then, holding the crumpled paper out to me, he spoke.

"I remember the morning he came in from kicking tents with you boys," said old Dad Moore. "One of his hands was all burned on the palm and on the finger tips. He wouldn't tell me how they got that way. After he'd had a bit of breakfast he fetched his dice out and rolled them on my counter—gambling to see if he'd enlist, or wait till the draft took him. He lost the toss and laughed that mocking

laugh of his. I couldn't even shake his hand, because his hand was burned."

While we three all stood staring at the paper Dad pointed with his finger tip. We saw an old familiar name again, and after it a word—*Missing.*

When we were all gone into old Dad's place I told them how the night before he went off to enlist Cully had saved the lives of all the sleepers in the town.

More months were gone. The placards disappeared from the postoffice. In twos and threes and sometimes singly the little town's young men came back to it. The shadows lifted now that war was done. Familiar faces bent above the packer's stools. Familiar forms pushed trucks about the loading floors. Laughter awoke, and people took life lightly once again. The papers no longer published lists of missing and of dead.

The machinery had stopped for a few minutes that one of the conveyors might be repaired. Billy and Kurtz and I strolled out to sit on the loading platform. While we sat there Barton passed by, with a newspaper sticking out of his hip pocket.

"What's in the paper?" Billy called.

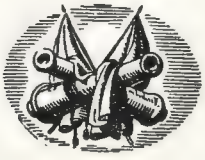
"Nothing," said Barton, and tossed the paper to us.

Together, Billy and Kurtz and I looked at a full page picture of the unknown soldier's burial.

With a clatter and clank and whirr the machinery started up. Rising to go back to our work, we looked into one another's faces.

"Who knows?" said Billy to me and Kurtz.

Above the hum of the grader conveyors I seemed for a moment to hear a low mocking laugh, and the clear quick rattle of dice again.



The STRAWBERRY EXTRA

A Story of Railroading in the Ozarks

By E. S. DELLINGER

FOR MORE years than Igghy Malone could remember the M & A and the G & P had been engaged in mortal struggle for supremacy down in the Ozark fruit belt. They had built numerous branches which, reaching out for native fruits, criss-crossed among the vine and tree clad hills like roots of hickory and blackjack; and both had extended their main lines to tidewater on the Gulf, whence they grasped trainloads of bananas and oranges and cantaloups for distribution in the North and West.

Not only their supremacy, but their very existence depended upon speed and dispatch in handling these home grown and imported perishables. The line which could guarantee earliest delivery into Pittman or Kansas City or St. Louis got the business and held it. Always the trains of these rival roads had been run in a race against time; and, since it is an immutable law of the universe that, distance being constant, time depends upon rate of movement, speed had become the fetish of every management.

Now since the responsibility for fast running comes to rest finally upon the shoulders of the engineers, both railways had early developed a group of fast men, who, knowing no fear, would trust section gangs to keep the road right, depend upon the dispatcher for a clear track, and then put miles behind them with little thought of margin of safety.

True, both roads had their slow hogheads—fellows who would not take a chance. They did not fire these. They

kept them, but the transportation department always managed to get fast men on their hot-shot merchandise and fruit, and held their slower men for dead freight. And they always saw to it that the fast ones got the favors, while the slow men were looked upon with something like contempt.

Among the fast ones there was not another hogger who could make time with Igghy Malone. When the yards made him a train, when the roundhouse gave him an engine, when the dispatcher handed him a schedule, no matter how fast that schedule was nor how late on it, Igghy would pull his striped cap over his mop of red curls, twist his freckled face into a grin and, forgetful of the three little Malones in Pittman, start trying to get on his schedule and stay there.

If the run happened to be strawberries, with a schedule fast enough to kink rails and scorch journal packing, it only suited Igghy Malone the better, especially if he got a chance to stage a race with a strawberry train on the G & P along the sixteen-mile stretch where the rival roads parallel each other into Pittman.

Igghy would coax his engine up inch by inch until it was alongside the fleeing caboose of the G & P, wiggle his nose at the train crew, curse them when they threw bolts and nuts at him, creep alongside the rocking string of yellow reefers until the two trains were running nose and nose, and then, with a signal of triumph to the humiliated fireman, he would roar ahead of them to the crossing.

But finally there came a streak of hard luck—plain, downright hard luck; nothing else. Merchandise train turned over and burned up; passenger train in the ditch, a dozen killed and injured; strawberry train rolled off the dump down by Noble; big block of stock bought up by the P & C from the West. Yes, that was hard luck, too, for it put on the board of directors an ex-superintendent off the P & C, a cautious old fellow who understood railroading in the wheat country, but not in the Ozark fruit belt.

Coming to the board at the time of their hard luck, he nosed into the business of the transportation department, argued that the series of accidents was undoubtedly due to excessive speed, finally got enough influence to compel the general manager to demand speed restrictions.

The general manager, backed by the traffic department, put up a stiff fight, told knocker, board and president it would ruin their business, urged that the matter be left to the men who were on the ground looking after operation; but in the end he was forced to make a show of carrying out their wishes.

While the fight was still going on, Pop O'Hara, who had been superintendent of the Arkansas division ever since the building of the road, cashed in. The knocker succeeded in getting Carl Paxon, a young rulebook trainmaster off the P & C, put into the old man's place. Paxon's first official act was to issue a bulletin to all train and engine crews restricting speed to thirty miles an hour over the Arkansas division. He posted the bulletin on board and book in every terminal. He sent a copy of it to every conductor and engineer. He swore he would stop the wrecks on his division of the M & A.

For nearly a month road men, reasoning, as the general manager had done, that the M & A could not afford to reduce speed on their perishable stuff, considered the bulletin a bluff—a scheme foisted upon the road men to clear official skirts if more wrecks came along. They read the bulletin, winked at it, swore at it, and went ahead running as fast as they could get their wheels rolling.

There had not been a day but some one on the Arkansas had run a freight hog sixty miles an hour and come home to boast about it. Paxon knew it, of course. He could not help knowing it, but he was lying low, waiting for something to happen.

And it did.

On the morning of the thirtieth day of his reign, he came into the yard office at Slone Springs and, glancing through the bulletin book, saw where some wag had written under his restricting bulletin in

big letters the one word, "Bullony." His smooth face turned red, then white, then red again. He bit his cigar in two and threw both ends on the office floor. He strode down to the office and had the dispatcher put out a "31" order to all train and engine men, bearing the contents of the bulletin, and gave a copy of it to each train crew leaving the terminal that day.

In that way every crew on the division would have to sign the order. Two hours after the order was out trainmen were gathered in little knots discussing it, some shrugging their shoulders, others wagging heads dubiously, speculating on what it would do for business on the M & A.

THAT night Igghy Malone was called for a banana train at 7:35, with Big Bill Kelley as conductor. The train was nearly an hour late getting into Slone Springs. Igghy coupled the engine on the string of reefers and was down fussing about the drivers when Kelley came over with the orders.

"What you got, Kelley?" he queried anxiously as the conductor strode up beside him.

"Nothin' much," boomed Kelley. "Got our runnin' orders, and thirty minutes on No. 3, and this—this damned slow order."

He held out the tissue sheets to the engineer and stood stuffing his finger into the bowl of his cob pipe.

"To hell with the slow order!" growled Igghy, his blue eyes glittering like bits of hot steel while the pink between the maze of freckles turned brick red. "I reckon that blasted, white collared buck passer has made you sign that bull o' his which says, 'Freight trains shall not exceed a speed of thirty miles per hour between Slone Springs and Pittman.' Huh?"

"You bet he has. I signed fer it, too, an' I'm beginnin' to believe the damned nut means it. An' I'm tellin' you, Igghy, so far as I'm concerned if they want these trains run thirty miles an hour, then thirty miles an hour it is. If we ever put one of 'em in the ditch runnin' fifty, then it's your job an' mine. I don't mean maybe."

With a growl Igghy stuffed the roll of orders into his pocket, glanced at his watch and stood staring gloomily out where the pink glow of evening still lingered in the western sky.

"We won't have a job long anyway if we live up to that order, Kelley," he finally argued. "You know as well as I do that they can't hold fruit trains down to thirty miles an hour an' keep the business —not with the G & P runnin' stuff through in highball time. I don't believe that white collared son of a gun ever meant for anybody to live up to that order when he put it out."

He picked up his torch and oil can off the side rod and started for the gangway. His hand on a grab iron, he faced the conductor.

"I'm hired to run a engine, Kelley, an' as long as I'm engineer I aim to run it. Savvy?"

He swung up the steps of the No. 810. Bill shrugged his broad shoulders and called up through the blow of steam and the pound of air pumps:

"You're runnin' this engine all right, you damned little red headed sapsucker, but I'm goin' to tell you right now—"

"You bet your pants I'm runnin' this engine, an' I aim to run it till I'm fired."

Bill swung a highball. Igghy climbed to his platform, whistled two shorts, set the reverse in the corner, turned on the sand, clicked back his throttle and went clanking out through the almost silent yards.

Pulling away from the green, yellow and red lights of the Slone Springs yard, he read once more the restricting order:

> Freight trains will not exceed a speed of thirty miles per hour between Slone Springs and Pittman.

Then he carefully computed his schedule. It allowed him exactly two minutes to every mile from Slone Springs to Pittman. Two minutes to the mile! Igghy knew that no train could be run at a rate not to exceed thirty miles an hour and yet average a mile in two minutes. There

were hills to be dragged up, trains to be met, water to be taken. And if this schedule were not sufficient proof that the slow order was a bluff, then he was an hour late on his schedule when he left Slone Springs.

"Thirty miles an hour, hell!" he muttered, slipping the tissue sheets into his overall pocket and looking back along the string of forty white and yellow reefers rocking in the moonlight. "If this damned outfit aimed fer a man to hold down to thirty miles an hour they wouldn't put out no such a schedule. They aim fer us fellers to put trains over the road same as we always did, but they want to throw responsibility on us if anything happens. Bullony!"

As he left the yard lights behind him, he quickly picked up to thirty miles an hour, then forty, then forty-five. Fireman and brakeman stared apprehensively across the cab at him. He sat grimly erect on the seat box, jaws squared, left hand lying on the throttle lever, right resting on the window ledge.

"Old Igghy's goin' to be damned sure he makes that thirty miles an hour," laughed the brakeman.

"Yeah. He's makin' it all right, too."

With a shrug the fireman slipped on to the deck and poured in coal until black smoke leaped skyward from the short stack. The brakeman lighted a cigaret and sat looking back along the train. The engine was running smoothly. The cars were swaying easily to and fro, and far back on the train, dimly outlined against the sky, a hobo sat atop a reefer.

The engineer glanced inside at gages, lifted the reverse almost to center, cracked the throttle another notch and listened to the thunder of the exhaust. He was making a mile a minute. But then, what hogger could afford to fool along thirty miles an hour with a banana train an hour off schedule? Certainly not Igghy Malone, the man who held the record for fast time on the Arkansas.

At Langston, thirty-five miles out, he had made up twenty-five minutes of his lost time. At Wellville, he was within ten minutes of his schedule. Between Wellville and Marston, looking back, he saw a white light swinging a stop sign from the caboose. With a curse he answered the signal, called out the flag and brought his belated train to a stop.

"Hot box?" he questioned the brakeman when, twenty minutes later, the head shack slid down the coal to the deck.

"Yeah. Hotter'n the ribs o' hell," returned the disgusted trainman.

"Git 'er fixed up so she'd run?"

"Yeah. Old Man Kelley said tell you to take it easy to Lipton, though."

"O. K, buddy."

When he left the water tank at Lipton, Igghy was twenty-seven minutes behind time, with thirty-five miles in which to make it up. Going around the sharp curves between Lipton and Junction, he slowed down to forty. But pulling out of Junction, he had his throttle wide open and was swearing because there were no more notches on it.

FIVE miles out of Junction a long sweeping curve begins where the M & A tracks follow the banks of Grand River. Many a time Igghy had taken this curve at sixty or better. He had the throttle wide open tonight, but the most he could get out of the old No. 810 on this curve was fifty-five. He was standing on his platform, leaning far out, watching the track. Suddenly, a hundred feet ahead of him he saw what appeared to be a streak across the rail. Instantly he sensed the meaning of it, knew it was a break. He shoved up his throttle, shot his air into emergency and yelled at fireman and brakeman. But it was too late. The engine struck the broken rail, shot off the embankment and went rolling down into the shallow waters of Grand River.

It landed on its side. Up-ended reefers came following it. They piled thirty feet high and crowded into the ditch farther down. As luck would have it, none of the men was seriously hurt. Igghy got a few scratches and a burned leg. The brakeman sustained a broken arm. The fire-

man was not scratched. But when the wrecker came out to clear away the smash, only five of the forty cars were left upright on the rails.

Igghy wrote up his 705 report, explaining fully how the accident had occurred. He mentioned the broken rail, left the place for rate of speed blank and confidently expected the matter to end there as such accidents had always ended.

It did not. In spite of the fact that no speed, certainly not thirty miles an hour, could have prevented the wreck, the minute he hit the platform in Pittman the call boy notified Kelley and himself to report directly to Mr. Paxon.

They were two uneasy railroaders when, that evening, they made their way together into the superintendent's office. Paxon was sitting at his desk. He paid no attention to them for five minutes, but kept on writing.

At the end of that time he whirled his chair about and, voice a-quiver, blurted out—

"You fellows have sure played hell now, haven't you?"

"How so, Mr. Paxon?" returned the engineer. "We hit a broken rail."

"Broken rail, the devil! Maybe you did hit a broken rail, but who ever heard of puttin' thirty-five cars in the ditch on upgrade running thirty miles an hour? I want to know how fast you was runnin' when you turned that engine over, Malone."

"Why, Mr. Paxon, we was runnin'—" began the conductor.

"I spoke to Malone, Mr. Kelley. I'll ask you to keep your information to yourself till I call on you."

Igghy was staring with mild eyes out at a switch engine shuffling a string of empty reefers in the yard. He glanced at Bill Kelley, and a smile played about his pink lips. Bill looked startled.

"Malone, I asked you a question." The superintendent's gray eyes were fixed searchingly upon the freckled face of the hogger.

"Well, Mr. Paxon," drawled Igghy, letting his twinkling blue eyes meet the angry gray ones squarely. "Mr. Paxon, I'm not goin' to lie to you. I was tryin' to keep on my schedule, an' I was rollin' that pawpaw wagon jist as fa-a-a-ast as the wheels'd turn."

Igghy shook his red head in mock sadness. The superintendent leaped angrily to his feet and started pacing up and down the floor. After what seemed to the two culprits an interminable time, he whirled back to his desk, dropped into his chair and drew out a sheaf of executed train orders. Selecting one from the lot, he laid it before Kelley. It was the slow order of the preceding day.

"Is that your signature, Mr. Kelley?" He indicated the conductor's signature line.

"Yes, sir." Big Bill's voice was quivering slightly, for he saw his job slipping slowly out from beneath him.

"Did you read that order before you signed it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Malone, did you have a copy of this order?"

"Uh-huh."

"What does it say?"

"It says somethin' about freight trains not runnin' over thirty miles an hour," drawled the engineer, still thinking that a fat chewing was all that was to come of it.

Paxon stared at him incredulously. These men had the effrontery to sit there and coolly admit they had disobeyed orders—train orders, orders for which they had solemnly signed before going out on their run. Their coolness maddened him. He brought his fist down on the table with a bang.

"Then, damn you, you're fired, both of you. I aim to put a stop to this reckless runnin' down here on this division. I'm goin' to teach this bull necked outfit a lesson, an'—you're the pair I'm startin' with. You're fired! Do you understand it? Fired! Both of you!"

Bill looked at Igghy. Igghy looked at Bill. Then they started trying to argue with the new super, but it was no use. Their arguments were as effective as his bulletins and orders had been. When

they left the office, anybody but Igghy Malone would have been fully convinced that he was looking for a job.

But Igghy Malone was not the man meekly to accept discharge for his first blunder. He had not seared his eyeballs in the glare of a white hot firebox for five years and then bucked the extra board herding M & A scrap heaps over the Ozark hills five more to give up his seniority without a fight.

He took his case to the grievance man of the engineers. The grievance man, seeing that he had not much of a case, took it to the master mechanic. The master mechanic took it to the superintendent of motive power, and that worthy took it back to Paxon. But Paxon was adamant. He refused to budge from the stand he had taken.

For three months Igghy remained in Pittman. His bank balance disappeared. He dropped the payments on his home. His wife became hollow eyed from worry, and his children went to school almost ragged. Still he held on doggedly, trying to get himself reinstated.

At the end of six months, so persistent was he in his efforts, the case came before the general manager. The general manager, since he lavished no love on the superintendent, in his persuasive way prevailed upon Paxon to reinstate both Igghy and Bill. Paxon was sore. He declared it would ruin his discipline if he had to take them back, but as a concession to him, the general manager permitted him to set any conditions upon their reinstatement which he saw fit.

Paxon then required both of them, like two truant school boys, to sign a solemn pledge that never again as long as they were in the employ of the M & A would they run a freight train more than thirty miles an hour.

By this time, due to the slowing down of traffic, business was slipping away from the M & A and going over to the G & P. Usually at Christmas time, the Arkansas division had been using a hundred train and engine men, and keeping every available engine working. Now they had sixty men barely making a living and their engines were rusting in the back shops. Their fast business had practically all left them.

By the end of Paxon's first year as superintendent, he prided himself that all his trains were moving thirty miles an hour or less, but it was also a fact that they were hauling only one banana train a week against, in the past, a dozen or twenty; and the prospects were that the M & A would get less than ten per cent. of the strawberry business for the coming season.

With the loss of business, men were taken out of service. Engineers and conductors who had held regular turns as promoted men for years were back firing and braking. The G & P, prospering by their rival's loss, had put on a lot of new engines—powerful, speedy fellows which whizzed by the decrepit M & A scrap heaps, creeping along at thirty miles an hour.

The G & P men gloated over the ruin of the M & A. The thirty mile ruling for which Igghy had served a six months' enforced vacation and lost his home was ruining business and the men who handled it. They were sore. They cursed the job and the officials from the superintendent up.

All but Igghy. Since he had been reinstated, Igghy had gone around with his head low. As an engineer he was a joke. He would not go anywhere, nor take any chances. When a train crew got out with him, they could figure on a sixteen-hour day. He never ran an engine more than thirty miles an hour, generally clanked along at twenty-five. He would not go, say, from Lipton to Marston, unless he had running time and ten minutes' clearance against a superior train. Knowing that Paxon was watching him and waiting for another chance to fire him, he became a rulebook railroader, and he never tried to interpret the rules. Every time he was tempted to take a chance, the nightmare of those six lean months arose to block him.

Affairs continued in this manner for

several months after his reinstatement. Then, business falling off to the breaking point, and accidents continuing, a reaction set in. Restrictions were removed. Speed once more became the fetish of the M & A. Paxon was compelled to pull down his thirty mile bulletin; but, unwilling to admit his defeat, he replaced it with another, reading:

> Every effort must be made to put perishable freight and merchandise through with the least possible delay. But in no case shall train and engine men assume a speed which is dangerous to cars or contents.

In their efforts to regain the business they had lost, the company bought some new engines, especially built for fast freight service—oil burners with superheaters and "boosters" on them. Then the fast runners of the old régime, although they were not certain what they would be permitted to do under the new speed bulletin, gradually began to regain their old spirit, their old urge to get over the road.

Mart Warder brought a belated No. 31 down the one hundred twenty-eight miles from Pittman in three hours and twenty minutes. Pop Rader took a banana train up in three and five and stopped to cool a hot box. When strawberry season opened they were really railroading on the Arkansas once more; Shorty Wilson and Betty Zane and all the rest—all except Igghy Malone.

WHEN the reaction had come, Igghy had been given his chance to come back. He caught the "Dixie Meat" out of Pittman an hour and ten minutes late. Down at Marston, then an hour and twenty minutes late, he had running time and six minutes clearance to go over to Wellville for No. 4. Plenty of time, but rules required ten minutes' clearance. Consequently, when he whistled for Marston he whistled a meeting point. Back in the caboose, Old Hank Murphy swung a highball. Igghy answered it, but he headed in. Old Hank came over to the engine, raving.

"Why didn't you go on over to Wellville, you damned red headed mudheel?" stormed the conductor as soon as he got within hearing distance.

"Didn't have time."

"Time the devil! I've seen you go over sixty miles an hour with two minutes' clearance. What's the matter with you, ballin' things up like this when we're tryin' to git this stuff through on time? Huh?"

Igghy set his flickering torch on the side rod and shoved the nose of his oil can between two drivers.

"I got fired *once*, fer takin' chances, Hank," he said slowly, as he backed out from between the drivers. "There's a white collared buck passer named Paxon that's itchin' fer the time when he can fire me again. I ain't takin' no chances."

Setting torch and oil can on the pilot, he stood wiping his hands on a piece of cotton waste.

"You might as well git fired fer doin' a job railroadin' as to git fired fer foolin' around," argued the conductor.

The torchlight flickered on Igghy's serious face. His blue eyes were turned solemnly upon the conductor.

"They don't fire men fer railroadin' according to rules, Hank. The fellows that have got fired off this division are the ones that took chances. I signed a pledge never to run a engine more than thirty miles an hour. Till Paxon gives me back that pledge I aim to live up to it. I've got a wife an' kids to think of. Thirty miles an hour's my limit, an' I'm givin' first class trains ten minutes' clearance. No less."

The "Dixie Meat" arrived in Slone Springs exactly two hours late that night. Igghy received a nasty letter from the trainmaster, asking him to explain the delay. He replied, giving a legitimate reason for every lost minute, and the matter was dropped.

When a few days later he caught a banana train an hour off schedule and put it into Pittman without having made up a minute, he was marked down as one of the slow hoggers. He did not fit into the new scheme, and he was left pulling drags with the old engines; he was given a hot-

shot only when he was lined up so they could not possibly get around him.

If Paxon remembered the pledge, he never mentioned it. Doubtless he had entirely forgotten it. But Igghy still remembered, and though sometimes when lying in some blind siding a banana train or the "Dixie Merchandise" thundered by him, he felt a tingling in his blood mingled with a feeling of bitter resentment toward the world in general and Paxon in particular, he kept to the rules and lived up to his pledge.

One evening early in the strawberry season, he was called for a drag north out of Slone Springs. As he came down to the roundhouse for his engine he noticed a dark curtain of cloud hanging low down in the northwest, with lightning playing all about its edges, and lonely clouds scudding across the dim stars.

"Goin' to rain tonight, Shorty," he remarked to the fireman.

"Yeah, always rains when you git out on a midnight drag," returned the fireman disgustedly as he swung his grip and scoop into the gangway.

Igghy oiled the old No. 816 around. She had been his regular engine in the days when the 800's were the pride of the M & A. It was the old 816 which had helped him make his reputation the night he pulled the strawberry extra from Slone Springs to Pittman in two hours and forty minutes. Some trip, that! And the record still stood. But now—now the old 816 was little more than scrap. Soon her pilot wheels would be knocked off and she would go into the yards as a switch hog. Igghy shook his graying head sadly. His wrinkles deepened. Maybe it would be better if he, too, quit the road and went running an engine in the switch yards. He shuddered at the thought.

As he backed into the yard to couple on to his contemptible mixture of coal and lumber, hay and junk, he noticed a group of officials pacing uneasily up and down the cinder walk. Something unusual, he thought, for them to be out this time of night with no wreck on the division. Still, Paxon was there, and the trainmaster and the general manager and several others whom he did not know.

He backed languidly by them, slowed down and coupled lightly into the drag on Track 2. Old Hank Murphy climbed to the cab with the orders.

"Malone, your yallow bellied cowardice, your cussed contrariness, or whatever ails you, has give us a drag tonight instead of a strawberry extry," growled the old conductor.

"Yeah? How so?"

A spark kindled in the blue eyes. Kindled and as quickly died. Red surged up between the freckles and lingered there.

"Got a strawberry train comin' in, an' they called us ahead of it fer this damned drag so's to put Betty Zane on that extry. Said it'd spoil before you could git it into Pittman."

Igghy winced. The conductor turned with a sneer of contempt and, dropping down the step, strode off toward the caboose. Igghy carefully read his orders and handed them to the fireman; then, climbing to his platform, he slouched down on the seat box. He was stuck for No. 3—could not get out of Slone Springs for thirty minutes. He stared across the cab, saw the lightning playing, now higher up the sky.

The fireman checked orders back to him and returned to the left side of the cab. At the south end of the yard the chimes whistle of one of the new M & A Mikados sounded four times, calling for a signal. A lantern by the south switch rose and fell. The chimes whistle spoke twice, quickly, and a minute later the new Mike thundered by Igghy to grind to a stop on Track 1, two journal boxes smoking.

The moment the strawberry extra came to a stop, the injured locomotive was cut off to go limping away, dry axles squealing, foul smoke trailing behind her.

"Damned shame to abuse a new engine like that," criticized Igghy when the fireman crossed the gangway to watch her departure. "I'll bet the poor devil that brought her in in that shape catches hell for it. Probably be his last trip."

"Yeah. Must be tryin' to put that load o' strawberries through in a hurry."

The fireman, too, was now watching along the string of yellow reefers. Already a swarm of lights were flashing like fireflies along the train. Air men were testing brakes and inspecting couplings. Car whacks were flashing lights under cars to look for something dragging, while others pulled greased waste from hot journal boxes and stuffed in new. Igghy watched them with interest. Never since the night he had made his record had he seen such anxiety shown for a strawberry train.

The group of officials moved down to the head end, and before Zane had backed the 1531 in to make the coupling, the trainmaster and the superintendent were nervously flinging orders this way and that in a mad rush to get the strawberry train out of the yards. The general manager stalked to and fro. Another of the group, whom Igghy now recognized as the president of the Fruit Growers' Association, walked beside him.

Big Bill Kelley came out on a run with his orders and climbed to the cab. The 1531 whistled off and started clawing madly up through the yard, her booster cut in and working for all she was worth.

Igghy watched the reefers go filing by, saw the shivering green disk of the marker approaching down the lane between the trains, heard the frantic whistle of the 1531 calling for the board at the junction. Then something happened. With a bang and a clatter the brakes went into emergency. The moving reefers humped their backs and slammed to a stop. Soon voices were raised in frantic call toward the office and lights flashed by on the other side of the strawberry extra. Something had happened . . .

FOR five minutes Igghy sat in the cab, wondering at the rush, wondering what the trouble was with the hot-shot stuff; and a smile almost of satisfaction crossed his freckled face. Then down along the left side of the strawberry train two lanterns came bobbing rapidly up and down. As they drew nearer he could see dimly outlined in the subdued glow figures of well dressed men, two of them coming on a dead run.

As they approached the No. 816, the yardmaster began lining crossover switches from No. 2 Track to the other lead. Superintendent Paxon climbed hurriedly into the cab of the 816, followed by the general manager. Running past the tender, Big Bill Kelley snapped hose couplings, pulled the pin and signaled "ahead."

"We got to change you over to that strawberry train, Malone," informed the superintendent as Igghy switched on his cab light.

"Yeah?"

Igghy, responding to Bill's signal, started the No. 816 forward.

"Yes."

The young superintendent laid a hand on the back of the worn seat cushion and, thrusting his face forward to make himself heard above the bark of the exhaust, continued:

"The 1531 threw a side rod into the cab. Broke Zane's arm. We've not got another engine in the roundhouse fit to go but the 816, nor another engineer with his rest up. We got a train of hot-shot stuff that has to get into Pittman. An' we've got to use you and the 816 on it."

"Yeah?"

Igghy showed little excitement as he clanked out through the crossover and up track out of the southbound yard. Paxon cast a despairing glance at the general manager who stood with a hand on the throttle quadrant, watching Igghy's leisurely movements.

"You see, it's no use, Mr. Morgan," he groaned. "We can't possibly make it. Malone here won't run. He hasn't made a trip—"

"Malone!" broke in the general manager, taking a step toward Igghy. "Malone! Are you the Malone that was discharged off this division some months ago for fast runnin'?"

For a moment the engineer made no reply. A file of green and yellow lights was showing close ahead. By one of the

yellow ones a white moved slowly back and forth across the track. Igghy answered the signal and set the air. Then, turning his head inside the cab, he faced the official.

"Yes, sir. I got canned for fast runnin'."

"Hit a broken rail going between forty-five and fifty, I believe your reports showed?"

"Fifty-five, at least," corrected the engineer.

"Your papers also showed, if I remember correctly, that you held the record for short time on freight over this division. Am I correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Banana train, was it?"

"No, strawberries—forty-one cars—five years ago."

"I had forgotten. I remember dictating a letter of commendation to you at the time."

"Yes, sir. I've still got that letter."

"Your time for that trip was—I have forgotten."

"Two hours and forty minutes, Mr. Morgan."

Igghy looked out where the white light still swung idly by the yellow one. The general manager mopped his face with a white handkerchief, glanced from engineer to superintendent and back again.

"Then if you put a forty-one car train over this same road once in two hours and forty minutes, there's no reason why you can not put this thirty car train through on time tonight. It has to go. There's thousands in it for the M & A. The Fruit Growers' Association used to give us all their business—six thousand cars a year. For the past two seasons it has gone to the G & P. We staked our reputation on this train we are handling tonight. We promised them to deliver it to the P & C in Pittman at one o'clock or else buy the trainload outright. Do you understand? This train must be in Pittman—"

The general manager consulted his watch. The other three men in the cab did likewise. It was 9:54.

"We have three hours and six minutes in which to make delivery to the P & C. The Pittman yards will want at least twenty minutes. That leaves you two hours and forty minutes, Malone. I expect you to have it in the Pittman yards at 12:40—for the M & A." He added the last in a low tone.

The general manager held out his hand. Igghy, removing his gauntlets, gripped it. Then the wise official, leaving the cab, went striding across the main track. Igghy turned toward Paxon. There was the glint of cold steel in the blue eyes. There was red between the freckles. Red almost to match it mounted to the young superintendent's face. He threw away his half smoked cigar and lighted another. With a shrug, Igghy turned toward the window and Paxon crossed the gangway to look out at the other side.

Soon a switch engine crept past the 816, dragging the disabled 1531 up the main track. As soon as it cleared the switch, the lantern swung a highball. The main track switch flicked from green to red, and a second lantern signaled. Igghy leaned forward. Some of the old tenseness was in his movement—some of the old fire in his blood. With unerring accuracy, working throttle, sand, air, reverse, he brought the old 816 to rest against the strawberry extra at 9:57.

Before the air pump had quit working the tenseness had gone from Igghy's muscles, the glint from his eyes. He was slouching forward in his seat once more, and the troubled look was returning to his face, a haunted look. Through his mind had shot once again the thought of those six long, uneasy, jobless months; of the pledge he had given Paxon never again to run an engine in excess of thirty miles an hour.

He glanced at the broad back of the young official, then out at the hurrying swarm of lanterns and back. He opened his mouth to speak, then closed it. Finally he faced about and called—

"Mr. Paxon!"

The superintendent whirled to face him.

"Well?"

"Mr. Paxon, do you aim for me to run

this train a hundred twenty-eight miles in two hours and forty minutes?"

"I most certainly aim for you to if it can be done and you've got the guts to do it."

Red surged once more to Igghy's face. Then, remembering the general manager's kindness, he conquered his anger and in a tone soft as oiled waters said:

"Mr. Paxon, it can be done, an' I've got the guts to do it. But somewhere you got a little slip o' paper I signed for you when I was reinstated, swearin' solemnly never to run a engine over thirty miles an hour as long as I worked on this railroad. The mornin' I signed that pledge, you swore you'd git me on somethin'. You ain't. Since then I've railroaded accordin' to rules. When you pulled down that bulletin, you never let me off from that pledge. I didn't ask you to. I didn't give a damn. I'd found it a sight easier railroadin' thirty miles an hour than sixty, an' I know a man'll live a hell of a lot longer. But now this trip tonight. Morgan's kinda left it up to you an' me. Morgan's white. I can put this train in Pittman on time, or turn it over tryin'. It's a chance. I know it; you know it. What I want to know is, if I try it an' fail, does that pledge o' mine still stand?"

"Pledge be damned, Malone! I'd forgotten you ever gave one. I want this train in Pittman on time. If it ain't there, then I'm out of a job. If I know Mr. Morgan, you are, too. To show you I'm on the square, I'll ride the cab with you. Is that fair enough?"

PAXON swung down the engine steps and spoke a few words to the general manager before leaving. Kelley came over with his new running order, giving him his schedule and right over all trains. Almost before Igghy had read it, he whistled off and started the strawberry extra rolling. It was 10:01.

As the slack went out of the train, the hind brakeman swung a highball. Big Bill Kelley repeated it. The yardmaster, with a fancy flourish, signaled "away". Paxon climbed into the cab. The brakeman offered him the seat in front of the fireman, but he refused and, climbing to the box beside Igghy, sat clinging to the window sill while the miles fled behind them.

When they passed the yard limit they were doing thirty. At Garland they were hitting fifty. Igghy got upon his feet, peering ahead, giving an occasional yank at the throttle as if by doing so he might increase his speed. The cloud fringe was drawing threateningly nearer. Lightning was streaking the sky ahead.

At Dexter, twelve miles out, the storm struck them. Oak trees along the right of way bent until their tall tops swept the ground, straightened and bent again. Rain came in a solid wall, and with it hail. It beat against the cab windows. Igghy thrust his head outside, striving to see what was before him. On the downgrade through Graveland he never shut off steam nor set his brakes.

It seemed strange, this awful speed he had attained. Months of clanking over these rails had changed him. As he lurched around the banked curves, riding on one set of drivers, he began feeling a sensation he had never known before. Not since the night he had turned the 810 over in Grand River had he run an engine like this. A feeling akin to fear surged over him, fear of the terrific speed he had attained, fear of wreck and disaster. But he forced it from him. To check his momentum for the curve at Graveland Bridge meant loss of minutes he must have to put this train in Pittman. When he thundered by the siding he was doing close to seventy. The white signals of an extra freight gleamed on his right. A yell, a lantern swinging from the gangway, and he was crashing by them. His freckled face cracked with a grin as he imagined he could hear the men saying one to another:

"Must be Igghy Malone. No other damn' fool would run a engine down Graveland like that."

At 10:58 they were roaring through Wellville, fifty miles out. Not a word had

been spoken in the cab. Every man was grimly silent, grimly doing the work which was his. The storm was less violent. Igghy, looking back, could see the green marker twinkling through the light drizzle. On Wellville Hill he pinched his speed down to fifty for the curves. Looking back, he saw a white light which appeared to be coming toward him over the top of the train. He had watched it uneasily for perhaps two miles when the brakeman, coming across the cab to him, called—

"Hey, Igghy, what you reckon that light is, comin' over the top?"

"Kelley, prob'ly. Smells a hot box. Tryin' to find it."

"Hot one," groaned the super, slipping off into the gangway to peer back along the train. "Good Lord! Why do journal boxes have to run hot on a trip like this?"

"The wheels are rollin', Mr. Paxon. The wheels are rollin'," returned the engineer.

More dripping miles crashed backward. The white light seemed now moving rapidly, now standing still, now rising skyward, now sinking to the earth. Igghy could imagine Bill Kelley climbing down car ladders, smelling for the odor of burning grease, climbing up to come forward. The brakeman, taking a pail from the tender, clung to the steps of the rocking, reeling engine, drew water from the tank, returned to the cab, started climbing up the coal.

"You can't make it back there with an open bucket at this rate, kid," warned Igghy. "Take this water bag and fill it full."

The brakeman took the proffered canvas bag, poured it full of water from the pail and once more started climbing. The superintendent watched him.

"Be careful, boy," he warned.

When he was atop the coal pile the engineer stopped him once more.

"Hey, brakie!" he yelled to make himself heard above the roar of the train and the crash of thunder. "Come here!"

He dived into the seat box and came out with an eight inch stick of pin grease in his hand.

"Take this back there and stuff it into that box when you git it wet."

The brakeman opened his mouth and looked at the superintendent. The superintendent looked at Igghy Malone. Pin grease costs money. It is made for engine use. There was a bulletin, whose ink was barely dry, prohibiting its use in journal boxes under penalty of immediate discipline. Paxon had signed it himself. As the brakeman snapped the stick in two pieces and stuffed one into each overall pocket, the superintendent, his eyes twinkling through the smudge which now surrounded them, turned his back and looked out through the gangway where a lantern wobbled dangerously over the top of the speeding cars.

When the brakeman had gone Igghy watched the lanterns, both of them. Fear clutched at his heart—fear that one of the trainmen might lose his balance and go down beneath the squealing wheels, fear that the box might break out blazing and he would have to stop to cool or set it out. That delay would be ruinous. If he stopped here he could never make it. Ten or twelve cars behind the engine the lantern went down a ladder and stayed. The brakeman's light came to rest above it, moved down the ladder. Soon the two of them were clinging to the side of the car, which weaved in and out like a shuttle cock.

As they crashed through the switches of Andrews and raced away toward Marston, the storm broke once more about them, shut down like a curtain and cut the lanterns off from view, the lanterns which marked the place where the trainmen were fastening a cooler can to pour cold water on a hot car axle, and readjusting its packing.

Rain dashed once more against the cab window. Once more Igghy threw open the window and tried to watch the track ahead of him. But the rain was like a wall shutting them away from the unseen world into which they were always boring.

AS THEY rushed down upon the telegraph office at Marston, Igghy began calling frantically for the order board. Long before he could see the light his whistle was ringing out its *to-oo-oo-ot—to-oo-oo-ot—to-oo-oo-ot—to-oo-oo-ot!* Time and again he gave the signal, hoping the operator would hear and have the board clear as others had been which he had passed. But evidently the rain beating upon the station roof had drowned all other sounds, for when he came within sight of the order board light a bare hundred feet away, it was still red—signal that the station had an order for him. Expecting to receive no order, he was still whistling. Would that light never go green?

"Git this order," he yelled at the fireman.

Then, seeing that the fireman could not make it across the cab until they had passed the station, he shoved Paxon on to the deck and leaped for the gangway. There was no one in sight. He watched the light. When he was almost beneath the signal, the light shifted to green. The operator dashed out bareheaded and in shirt sleeves, giving a highball. According to rules, if the light was still red when he was within two hundred feet of the board, he should have stopped, backed up and gotten a clearance. But tonight he climbed back to his platform and whistled his answer to the signal. Paxon shrugged his broad shoulders and said nothing.

Halfway between Marston and Lipton the engineer caught a flicker of light wavering through the dashing rain on the head car. A moment later Kelley and the head brakeman, dripping wet, slid down the coal into the gangway. The brakeman was a pasty white, his cap was gone and he had no lantern.

"What's wrong, Kelley?" inquired the engineer as the conductor came up to the boiler head.

"Hot box on that ninth car."

"Will she run in?"

"I dunno. We put the coolie on 'er an' crammed in a coupla pounds o' pin grease."

Kelley looked dubiously at Paxon, then turned back to Igghy.

"Kid come damn' near gettin' his."

Kelley nodded at the head brakeman, who had climbed to his place in front of the fireman.

"How's that?"

"Them cars is weavin' till a monkey'd have a helluva time standin' up on 'em. They're slick as banana peelin's. Kid jumped across a couplin' back there an' fell down. Lost his cap an' lantern, an' mighty lucky he didn't lose more'n that."

The conductor wiped grease and water off his face with his red bandanna. Paxon shuddered. Igghy whistled for a crossing.

Three miles from Lipton the fireman, taking a clinker hook and conductor's lantern, started climbing back over the tender.

"Where are you going?" questioned the superintendent.

"Goin' to check my water—see if I got enough to git into Pittman."

He pulled his jumper collar about his neck and climbed out into the rain. A minute later he slid back with the coal into the gangway and crossed to the engineer.

"Ain't got but sixteen inches, Igghy."

He looked at the superintendent. Paxon looked at the engineer.

"Will it take you in, Malone?" he queried anxiously.

Igghy thought a minute. He checked the time. It was 11:50. He had made ninety-three miles in one hundred and nine minutes. His worst road was behind him. He had fifty minutes to go thirty-five miles and clear. But then he had to cross the P & C at Ashland and the G & P outside Pittman. Either crossing or both might be blocked. He could make Pittman with one stop, but not with two. Twice during his years of service he had run every tank on the division. Without turning his head he flung back over his shoulder:

"May make it—maybe not. If we stop for water an' then find one o' them crossin's blocked we're stuck. If we try it, an' then git stuck, we'll have to pull the fire an' be hauled in."

A white board arose through the rain on his right. He whistled for Lipton and whistled through. Bill and the super looked at him. Bill started whistling "Nearer My God to Thee". A smile played about the grease smeared mouth of the superintendent.

As the strawberry extra approached Junction, the storm subsided. The rain had changed to a light drizzle, and breaking clouds formed a thin veil over the face of the hidden moon. When he came in sight of the Junction signal it was against him. He began calling for it a mile away. Before the echoes of his fourth blast died on the midnight air, the board light went from red to green. He whistled off and went tearing through Junction, making a mile a minute.

Twenty-four miles to Pittman—thirty-nine minutes to make it. Thirteen miles to Ashland; P & C No. 4 due there at 12:20. Unless he could make Ashland by 12:15, if the P & C was on time, the tower would block him for No. 4. He checked his watch once more. It was 12:01.

When he rounded the curve going out of Gulfport where the G & P crosses the Grand River and comes alongside the M & A, he saw a pair of tail-lights gleaming red ahead of him. G & P tail-lights, he figured—strawberry train, maybe. He smiled grimly at the memories of other strawberry trains by which he had run on this very piece of track, strawberry trains with which he used to race, strawberry trains which for two years past had thundered by him dragging on, and hurried away into the north.

He sounded his old whistle—the challenge by which in former days he had announced his coming. The two lights hanging in the cupola windows each gave a startled movement—then each swung a highball, swung it high, swung it long. Into the roar of Igghy's own engine filtered the ring of a chimes whistle answering the signal—a chimes whistle! That G & P strawberry train had one of the new Mikes; not much chance to outrun it. Still at sixty miles an hour he roared on. He must beat it to the Pittman crossing. With barely a dozen minutes to spare, if the G & P man beat him to it, he might be blocked until too late.

The red tail-lights grew farther apart. The superintendent looked out at them with a feeling of apprehension. They looked as big as cart wheels, appeared to be on the very track he was riding, directly ahead. He shot one inquiring glance at the engineer—now standing, head thrust out, hand on the throttle giving it an occasional jerk—shrugged his shoulders and settled back.

Soon the figure of the G & P trainman sitting in the cupola window was visible. Bill Kelley moved to the gangway. The pilot of the 816 crept up alongside the G & P caboose. Green was showing now in the left marker. The red disappeared. Two voices from the cupola window hurled out foul epithets across the thundering space. But Igghy, Bill Kelley and the head brakeman hurled them back.

Paxon sat grimly watching. The caboose dropped slowly back and the reefers of the G & P strawberry train—forty-nine of them—were left behind. Approaching Ashland, Igghy was standing, watch in hand. It was still almost two miles to the P & C crossing. The time was 12:13, two minutes until No. 4 was due. If only he could get the board! If only P & C No. 4 would be five minutes late tonight!

THE TWO rival engines were now running nose and nose. Igghy's fireman was crowding coal into the roaring maw of the 816. The G & P man was working his stoker and shaking his grates. As the G & P headlight shone into his window, Igghy gave one loud laugh of triumph. Once more he had passed up a G & P, but not as he used to do in the days when he had the better power and they the poorer. If only the board would be for him at the P & C crossing!

A mile from the signal block he began calling for the board. It was red. It was against him. Anxiously he watched it. If only it would clear. The G & P man

was calling, too. The board remained red. The yellow caution signal shot by on his right. He shoved up his throttle. Black smoke poured into the cab. The fireman quit scooping and turned on his blower. The gap between engine and signal narrowed. The safety valve popped into a roar. Still Igghy was whistling frantically. He looked to his left. Saw far across the open country a headlight. P & C No. 4. Still calling for the signal, he applied his brakes. But the signal did not clear.

Paxon groaned. Igghy whistled out a flag. The brakeman scrambled for his buckets and started filling them with water from the tank. Igghy lighted his torch, seized oil can and wrench. The conductor dived into the seat box, snatching two sticks of pin grease, one of which he traded to the brakeman for a pail of water, and before the train had come to a stop both trainmen hit the ground looking for hot boxes. How many they found Igghy could not tell. While Paxon raved and paced the wet cinders, alternately cursing and praying, Igghy screwed down grease plugs, dashed water and stuffed fresh grease into boxes already smoking, poured oil on guides so hot he could hardly touch them. It seemed the 816, old as she had now become, was hot from pony truck to trailer.

At 12:18 Igghy called in his flag. At 12:19 the hind brakeman swung a high-ball. At 12:20 No. 4 crashed over the crossing. Before 12:21 the board was clear and Igghy was in motion. He must beat that G & P strawberry train to Pittman, for if he failed— But he could not fail. The general manager had said he must make it. And at home was the letter which the general manager had written him five years ago.

As he drove his engine forward without a slip of the drivers, he kept his eye on the G & P. The big Mike was barking—a loud, sharp, mighty voice which shook the earth and drowned the hoarse cough of his own 816, which was almost ready for junk. They had stopped nose and nose, yet now inch by inch the G & P was pulling away from him. The super was watching him uneasily.

"Can't you beat that fellow to Pittman, Malone?" blurted out the official, moving distractedly toward the gangway.

In the dim light of the cab, the G & P fireman leaned out and thumbed his nose at Paxon. Igghy saw him and laughed.

"I sure'n hell can't beat 'im startin', Mr. Paxon."

"And why? Please tell me! You haven't as big a train as he has."

"That booster, Mr. Paxon. Lissen to that booster."

Both men listened. Clicking in between barks of the big Mike, between coughs of the old 816, mingling with the rattle of bumpers and the squeal of wheels, came the staccato *tat-tat-tat!* of the booster engine, whose exhaust steam poured out through a pipe on the back of the tender, and whose every breath indicated that the tank wheels with which it was connected had been turned into added drive wheels to give the G & P train the advantage in starting.

Aided by the booster, the G & P train gained rapidly on the strawberry extra. By the time Igghy had the 816 running fifteen an hour, the G & P had snatched ten strawberry cars by him. But with sand sifting down upon his rails, with throttle changing to every increase in speed, Igghy was turning every trick he knew.

At fifteen miles an hour the G & P man had to cut out his booster engine and rely upon the power of the Mikado. At thirty miles an hour Igghy was holding his own, running even with a certain car. At forty miles an hour the car was drifting back. At forty-five, the car was even with his tender. Paxon had ceased his lamentations and was sitting quietly once more.

Then the brakeman, carrying the engine red light and his empty water pail, came sliding into the gangway.

"Everything runnin' all right, kid?" queried the engineer.

"Hell, no! We got a dozen boxes back there ready to break into a blaze. We couldn't doctor 'em all. Kelley wired

into Pittman to be ready, an' he said tell you to watch out fer 'em."

Paxon slipped off his seat and began walking the gangway like a caged lion. The brakeman, after filling his water bag, hung it on a hook and stood watching the left side of the train. Igghy watched the right.

The rain had ceased. Stars shone from a sky of deepest blue. In the west the moon crawled down through the treetops. Three miles out, the racing trains striking a downgrade, Igghy began gaining more rapidly on the G & P. He passed the tender. He left the engine behind him. Its light shone along his string of reefers, but into that light burst a glare from behind—a journal box on fire.

"Hey, kid!" he called to the brakeman. "You got one blazin' over here."

"Yeah? One blazin' on this side too. Two of 'em now," he added, seizing the water bag and striking for the top of the train.

"Goin' to stop and fix them?" queried the super in alarm.

"God, no! Ain't got time to stop."

"Aren't you afraid you'll wreck this train, Malone?"

"Mr. Paxon, I'm goin' to put this train in Pittman on time or burn a journal off."

Again the official shrugged his shoulders and over his face once more spread the smile. Soon the G & P, dropping back, became but a glare of light, into which other glares burst at intervals, to die and burst again—journal boxes blazing.

At 12:38, with a dozen boxes blazing on the strawberry cars, with the right main pin scorching hot, with babbitt melting in the guides, with two hot axles on the old 816, Igghy Malone brought the strawberry extra to a stop in the Pittman yards. Ordinarily such madness would cause the discharge of the engineer and the whole train crew—but, tonight, well, they had no fear.

Tonight was different.

Almost before they had stopped, the superintendent, without a word of praise or censure, dropped off to oversee the preparation of the train for delivery to the P & C. But, somehow, his interest in that train seemed to have gone with the cutting off of the 816. He watched Malone leaning out of the cab as he herded the old scrap heap out to the roundhouse. He shook his head; then turning on his heel, he went loafing down to where a pair of car knockers were cooling a hot box and slipping in a new brass.

The next evening Igghy caught the "Dixie Merchandise" down an hour and twenty minutes late. He put it into Slone Springs on time. And in Slone Springs the morning following, the caller awakened him at 10:30.

"Mr. Paxon wants to see you at 'leven o'clock, Malone," informed the boy with the air of one who bore a message of importance—a message of ill omen, Igghy thought.

"Wonder what the hell that white collared buck passer's got up his sleeve now?" he murmured. "Fast runnin', maybe. Maybe givin' the brakeman pin grease to run a hot box on. Maybe runnin' that Marston board. Dammit!"

When he entered the superintendent's office at 11:00 sharp, he found the superintendent of motive power sitting across the table.

Paxon, arising politely, set a chair for him.

"We're thinkin' about pulling you off the road, Malone," began the superintendent, as soon as Igghy was seated.

"Yeah? I figgered somethin' of the sort. Man rawhide his head off an' risk his neck tryin' to git this hot-shot stuff through on time fer you sons o' guns an' then—"

"Maybe you don't understand, fellow," broke in the super. "We decided some time back to put a travelin' engineer on this division. We never found the right man until yesterday. Do you want the job?"

Now Igghy Malone wears a white collar, too. True he wears it under overalls. But, you see, he's trying to show the rest of the boys how to get hot-shot stuff through on time.

THE BARB OF SPAIN

By HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

A SWARTHY host on alien enterprise,
Vanguard of empire, cavaliers of Spain,
They traversed, a bleak hunger in their eyes,
The burning plain.

Against the invasion of their iron tread
The unresisting desert gave no sound;
Yet with each shadow marched a formless dread.
The trailing lance knew rust. No other red
Marked the low mound.

The Seven Cities' vaulted treasure-hold,
Alluring dream of conquest, legend-wrought,
Jeweled Quivira, Acoma the Old,
Each ruthless dawn destroyed—the spires of gold
Fading to naught.

Beleaguered by the silence, by the sun,
Thwarted by ravening winds, by course unplanned,
The cavalcade of doom fell one by one
To some dark foe, some ghostly myrmidon,
Some unseen hand.

The lone survivor of that soundless march,
A night-black stallion, hunger-bit and lean,
Fronting the dawn, his crest a regal arch;
A Spanish barb—of blood no flame could parch,
No fate demean.

Importunate and velvet nostril wide,
  He drank his freedom. Nevermore to feel
The brutal curb restrain his native stride,
Nor evermore outrage his quivering side,
  The roweled heel!

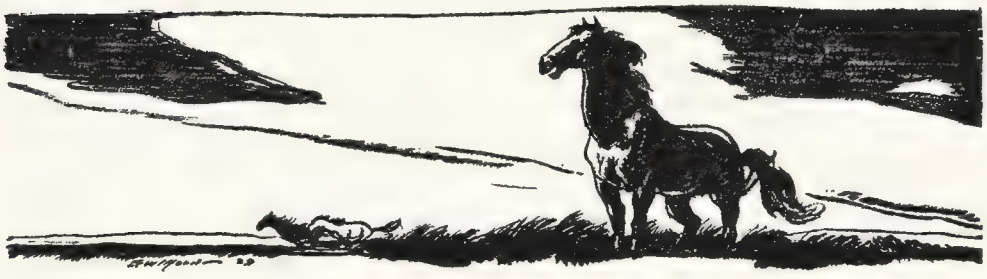
An ardent lineage burning in his eye,
  Beneath his hoof the banner of a king;
With rounding gaze he searched the barren sky,
Fled from the mute, the last lone tragedy,
  Shrill trumpeting.

What cañon wall flung back his questioning neigh?
  What nameless river cooled his sweating flank?
What treachery of night beset his way?
What hungering eyes, what enemies by day
  Watched while he drank?

By panther branded, scarred by thorny blade,
  Wild as his first wild sires of Barbary,
Tracking a desert legion, loud he neighed—
Swift from its ranks a fleet young Spanish jade
  Broke free.

Consort and mate . . . What breed with onward ears,
  Coursed the wide mesa, sentineled the height!
What sires and banded mares! How many years?
Where ride the Sioux, where flash Comanche spears,
  Beyond the night?

When phantom warriors gather for the quest,
  When phantom lodge-fires kindle on the plain,
A night-black stallion thunders down the West,
The lightning-flare his eye, the storm his crest—
  A Barb of Spain!



The Best War Novel Since

PART II

CRY HAVOC!

By

REDVERS

MOST of the Canadian Mounted Rifles from Toronto—including Hartley who had joined under age with me—had got it on the Somme. Hartley had died. As a convalescent casualty I was billeted at Bexhill, Hastings, and put on medicine and duty—getting fit for the slaughter all over again. I was very bitter, and my mind constantly dwelt on the circumstances which had thrust me into the war: my overzealous Mother, proud of her two elder sons who had died gloriously in battle. Women in Toronto pinning white feathers on kids, high school boys, because they hadn't enlisted. Poor old Father, using every influence to get into the army, partly, I suspected, to escape Mother's frantic nagging.

Then my mind returned to Hartley, and I smiled at our schoolboy lies about our ages when we had joined the C.M.R's. And then a sweet peace, almost forgotten, stole over me as I realized that I was married; that the tender girl who had nursed me through the hospital in Charing Cross, London, was now my wife. My wife, Mrs. Lionel Thor . . .

Leonard H. Nason's "Chevrons"

Two months at Hastings; two months at Reserve; another month to reach my battalion in France: five months—five months, perhaps, to live.

I believe I was glad when the Yank, the same good old Yank who had come to Barriefield Camp, Canada, when I had, suddenly appeared at the Hastings Casualty Center. He had won a V.C. Could I attend the presentation tomorrow?

We went into a pub, but I couldn't finish my drink. I made some excuse, told the Yank I would see him later, and left. My wounded arm and leg were healing all too quickly. The Yank would be sent home; but I would go back, back to the blood and mud and the torture of seeing myself get killed. My imagination ran away with me. So I went into another pub and drank enough to deaden, to stupefy the brain within me that kept crying out. I didn't want to be afraid.

CHAPTER VII

KING'S CORPORAL

I MET the Yank that night as arranged, at the clock tower, and we immediately began trying to devise ways and means for me to attend the presentation ceremony, but we couldn't get any practical ideas, except for me to go A.W.O.L, and as I wanted leave to see my wife soon, that wasn't feasible.

The Yank was thunderstruck when he heard of my marriage and said he had a damned good mind to tell the O.C. my real age and get me kicked before I did it again. In spite of myself I laughed, for I had a sneaking idea that he wasn't much older than I was. But as to experience, we felt that we were old men. By this time we were mixing our drinks; that is, taking a whisky straight with bass for a chaser.

I was getting worried, for Yank was getting tight. After we had had another drink, he called a British Tommy.

"Say, you blasted Britisher, come here. Have a drink." The Tommy grinned and had a drink. "Well, do you know, I'm going to get a medal from his nibs, the King, the King, God bless 'im. Have a drink. And after he gives me the medal I'm going home—an' Slim's going back, but I'm going home . . . That's a joke. I will be planting potatoes back in our garden, and poor old Slim here will be pushing 'em up. That's a joke, Tommy. Yes, sir, good joke. Why don't you laugh? Ain't you got a sense of humor? Ha-ha-ha-ha! Slim's a frien' of mine, see? I'd knock the blooming daylights out of him if he wasn't. Yes, sir, there I was lying on the ground, and the big stiff kicked me. He saved my blasted neck for me once, didn't you, Slim, old boy? Ha-ha-ha! The joke's on you, Slim. I'll be putting 'em in, you'll be pushing 'em up. Let's have another."

But I led him home to his hotel, and on the way to my billet his mocking laugh rang in my ears.

The days passed with daily letters to and from my wife, and I was anxious to see her again. Her letters were wonderful—an inspiration, a joy that never will be forgotten. She was such a beautiful, healthy, sporting creature, and her mind was interesting and fine.

One day she wrote:

> Something keeps telling me, "Hurry, hurry, love him as much as you can, *while you can.*" Oh, darling, darling, I love you.

Moved by her letter, I read it again, and the last part struck me. "*While you can.*" I laughed and laughed and laughed. Everybody seems sure, so sure I am going to die. Isn't it a joke? Oh, hell, I can only die once. And they might get fooled at that.

That night the telegram came.

PLEASE COME AT ONCE.

I went to the O. C, obtained four days' leave, saw the paymaster, and out of the kindness of his heart he gave me two quid, although my pay was already overdrawn. I left on the train that night, and I had been so busy getting ready that I didn't have time to think. I felt more curiosity at first than premonition . . .

I arrived at the house early in the morning. Since our marriage she had taken a flat in Crouch End. As I walked up the first flight of stairs everything was very silent. I hunted in the gloom for the knocker, and the door opened, and I saw a nurse standing there. Good Lord, what's the matter? Then I saw the doctor, and in one crushing blow, I knew. Something had happened to her. My head began to buzz.

Then I spoke:

"Are you a doctor? I am her husband; what's the matter?"

I waited, and heard a clock ticking, one I had asked her to buy, as I wanted a real old grandfather's clock in our home, the kind that had a nice fat solemn tick and boomed sonorously. Silence. Then I became conscious that the doctor was speaking.

"Now, please don't take it hard. Go easy."

"Say, what's the matter? I'm all right. What *is* the matter?"

"I'm very sorry, very sorry, but your wife died this morning at four o'clock."

He put his arm around me, but I threw it off, and went to the window, and I am afraid I was a coward then; my whole body slumped.

"Died, did you say, doctor? How?"

The nurse told me.

"She was on her way home after posting a letter, and was struck by a bus. It proved serious."

The world changed into a gray haze. I was tired, oh, God, I was tired. So that was what it meant. "*While you can*" applied to herself, not to me. I groped toward the doctor, whom I couldn't see very well.

"In pain, Doctor?"

"Oh, no; oh, no." I knew he lied. "She never recovered consciousness." I knew he lied again. The nurse asked:

"Do you wish to see her? She looks lovely."

Damn you, you cold blooded ghouls!

"No, no. I don't want to see her now. I want her alive, alive!"

Then came unconsciousness.

I woke in darkness, but there was a light in another room, and I raised myself and peeped in. *She* lay on the bed, and her mother knelt beside it, praying. Poor old soul, she certainly had her troubles, sons dead or blinded, now her daughter gone. No more would we hear that lovely little laugh, so sweet, like bells in the evening.

I OBTAINED two days' extra leave, and then returned to Hastings.

I carefully schooled myself for further blows, and tried to put on a veneer of hardness, a poker face that would not show agony. But my hair grew grayer.

I attended every drill for physical exercise, dieted myself, cut out whisky and drank stout, took eggs in brandy, and doped myself with patent medicines. I worked hard to put myself in condition to be accepted and passed by the various boards. My leg looked pretty bad and I was afraid now that it might stop me from going to France. So whenever I was asked about wounds or scars, I mentioned only my hand, which was perfectly normal except when it was struck in a certain spot, then it tingled in most exquisite agony. I prepared to endure pain by striking this hand every day, but it took all the courage I had at first, and some I didn't have, and I broke out in cold sweats when waiting to muster sufficient nerve to do it.

The peculiar thing was that I grew popular among certain of my fellows. I attracted men who were quiet looking, who had the expression of coming death in their eyes. You can laugh, but I knew, and often later on, in France, I amused myself by picking out the men who would get it that trip, and I was never once wrong. It was something in their eyes. And these men came to me, seeming to get support; and we would drink together. They usually were the type that makes bookkeepers or parsons in civil life. Quiet chaps who wanted nothing more than peace, and now were in war, like a bunch of sheep without a shepherd. My hardness and coolness attracted them. I think that at that stage I would have made a good officer.

A few days later I was boarded, and sent to the reserve battalion at Shoreham. I was there three months.

Christmas Eve came, and I went to Brighton and spent it in a pub. It was there that I met Allen—Allen, one of the greatest influences on my wayward life. Allen, who if he had lived was going to found a new and greater religion.

I sat in the pub, half occupied with my drinking, and half watching the crowd drink, a motley of Canadians, Australians, French-Canadians, British Tommies, harlots and girls who were trying to be.

Then Allen came in, though I didn't know who he was then. He was riotously, gloriously drunk.

"What ho! Here we are again. Cough up the plunder. Shovel up the booze. This is my night to howl. Everybody drink! What? You won't let me? Be damned to you, set 'em up or I'll walk all over you, ruin you. Set 'em up!" The crowd, composed nearly all of colonials, laughed. "It's Christmas Eve! I'm Santa Claus tonight, and rolling in it. Hey there, Lonesome Luke, (to me) come and drink."

I smiled in spite of myself and walked over, and when he saw my badges, he shouted:

"Well, here's another C.M.R. Best outfit in the best army! Hey, drink up!" I drank. "Are you an original?" I modestly stated that I was not, but an 8th C.M.R. "Well, sir, put her there. I'm no blooming cavalry man. I'm infantry. Yes, sir. Infantry, 74th Battalion. When did you leave?"

"June second."

"I heard about it. Some scrap, worst scrap Canada's ever in. Put her there! You sure made your name for us that day. I joined after Sanctuary Woods. Did you know—?"

Here he strung off a list of names, but again I was forced to deny knowing any of them, but explained I had only joined the outfit two days before getting hit.

"Cook's Tourist, eh? In again, out again, on guard!" I grinned. "Well, brother, let's go. Where shall we go?" I didn't care. "Well, let's go anyway." And go we did.

We ended up next day in a hotel with splitting headaches, a link of sausages, an alarm clock, and a collection of knives, forks and spoons, evidently collected from different restaurants. We had a cold bath, H. P. Sauce and soda water, and felt like new men. Then breakfast, after which we both felt stronger again, and back to normal. And Allen expressed it nicely when he asked—

"Where the devil did I find you?"

I explained, and we both laughed over it.

"Well, it was a glorious battle," he said. "Have you got a pass?"

I said I had one until midnight, but it was evidently after midnight now. He was in the same position, so by mutual consent we decided that we might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, and stay away over Christmas. I said:

"Well, I just got out of clink, anyway, and I owe the army enough money to make me work for nothing for the next year. I'm due on the first draft, so it doesn't make any difference."

"What? Are you due on the next draft? So am I, and I'm in debt too, so let's go, Sobersides, and have one whale of a time. How much money have you got?"

We both counted our resources, and I had two Canadian ten dollar bills sent in the last letter from home, two ten shilling notes, and about a quid in silver. He had five twenty dollar bills, evidently from a similar source, and about five shillings in silver.

"Now," he said, "you got to take charge of the exchequer, and when you say we are broke, we will go home."

And so passed five days, and we were broke. We went home, reported, were scolded by the sergeant-major, hauled up the next morning and given fourteen days more in the guardhouse, which was cut short on the tenth day by the draft for France.

WE LEFT for France on the thirteenth of January. While getting ready, I heard from a chap who said the Yank was on his way back home.

It was a pitch dark night and we sat on the deck hunched up against stanchions. The ship was crowded with humanity, and several were ghastly sick. To go inside in the nauseating air meant getting sick yourself, so we endured the cold and wet in preference. Allen was holding forth on war and telling me of the changes I would find when I got back.

He was a cheerful beggar. He told me about Regina Trench, where they couldn't spare men to take the prisoners out, and hit on the brilliant idea of cutting all the buttons off their trousers, so their hands

would be kept so darn busy holding their trousers up, that they were harmless.

Nearly a month passed—a month filled with incessant tests, from gas to teeth. And after the customary blood-curdler from the parson (which sounded standardized by this time) we were on our way to the rendezvous with death.

The slow, rickety, dirty French train creaked on. We were packed in like sardines. Allen and I were sitting in the doorway, feet out, swinging idly as the country rolled by. We were watching for stray hens near roadways, and gazed after them with longing eyes as we were carried on. Allen could kill and skin a hen in five minutes, and we could cut it up, make a fire in the car out of sandbags and candles and stew it. The French of course objected strenuously to this practise, but as our authorities always paid them double, they won both ways. For they got the pleasure of being virtuously angry at those thieving Canadians, and also of getting paid for their losses.

My imagination had always conjured up Frenchmen as emotional, excitable, kind hearted gentlemen. But reality, startling you, shows them as selfish and cold. Their excitement is carefully planned and executed to gain a desired end, the same as a woman's tears. The troops, however, grew accustomed to this attitude, even grimly relished it.

And as for the French women! Well, the least said, soonest mended! Allen said to me once—

"You know, Sobersides, you can tell a nation by the women." He went on to razz the women of England, Canada and the United States.

I protested.

"Oh, give the poor dears more credit."

"Well, Sobersides, maybe I will sometime, but I have my doubts. But it is our own fault. One of the curious things about life is that the best women are those who are attracted to absolutely rotten husbands, like myself, or who have a large batch of kids. A woman's soul thrives on suffering, physical and mental. Now take my wife. She knows that I am no good, that marriage with me is a joke, that I only appreciate her when I come home and have my tears wiped away, and yet she grows more spiritual, more kind, every day. She knows what I do, and just because she knows, she would never go wrong."

We saw a hen, and made a dash, the train having stopped.

After our feast of stewed chicken that wasn't quite cooked, but tasted satisfactory all the same, we were again back in our doorway. I was anxious to start him off again, so I asked—

"What do you intend to be if you ever get home again, Allen?" He considered it gravely, and then gave his decision.

"Well, if I ever get home, which I don't think I will, I believe I will be a parson."

"A parson?" I ejaculated.

He nodded grimly.

"Yes, I will get the old man to put me through the Church of England and, believe me, when I get to preaching, they will hear a few home truths they never heard before!"

"But, Allen," I said, "why the Anglicans?"

He grinned that delightful grin of his.

"Because they didn't have the nerve to write down what they thought, and if they did, they are doing their best to live it down. I never met an Anglican who agreed with another Anglican yet, so they must be nearly right."

WE ARRIVED at St. Pol at last, and had a long march to reach our battalion, which was reported to be out on rest, somewhere. Finally we located it at what the soldiers called "Gooey Servins" which was probably as near as they could get to it in English. For Allen it was like an old boys' reunion. As for me, I looked hard and long to find some one I knew, but the old battalion machine gun section was broken, now Lewis guns were in vogue, so that I was really unattached. Allen, having had nearly four months in France before getting wounded, was an old soldier, and you know there is a saying

in the army that old soldiers never die, they only fade away. In other words, they know the ropes. And so, putting a fatherly hand on me, (he was about four years older than my army age, which would make him about twenty-five) he said:

"Now listen, Sobersides. I am going to try to get a bombproof for us, so stick by me. Nearly all the N.C.O's and officers are from my old outfit, the 74th, so just watch my smoke, and swear to everything I say."

Allen had told me that you get on if you look meek, so we tried to find an expression of resignation and martyred virtue. The regimental sergeant-major came over to us, grinning.

"Hello there, Allen. Got back from blighty at last, eh? You must have swung the lead pretty darn' bad to stay that long."

"Hello, Major. Oh, no, I really am back sooner than I should be, my wounds were so bad. But they said the old battalion was short of men, so I came back."

The R. S. M. retorted:

"Oh, yes. Men!"

Allen looked properly crushed, and I burst out laughing. (I forgot to mention that Allen had collected a Military Medal for bravery.)

The major was put in good humor because his joke was appreciated. He was a big framed, blond, fat, merry faced man of thirty-five, and had probably been a bartender or barber in civil life, I thought. I found out later that he had been a designer of women's dresses. He scratched his head and said:

"Damned if I know what to do with you two! This fellow Thor is an old machine gun man too, isn't he?" I admitted I was, and he went on. "Well, I'll be a good sport and make you battalion runners. How does that suit you?"

That is the way of regimental sergeant-majors the world over. We found out later that the O. C. had already detailed us for that and the R. S. M. merely tried to make it appear that he had done it, for his own glory and our praise.

We were both more than satisfied, as it meant lots of grub and little drill, with the privilege of appearing in the know to the rest of the battalion. We speedily made ourselves at home, and then hunted for the nearest canteens, wet and dry. We found the dry and then adjourned to the wet, where we drank each other's future in beer.

It was hectic in that canteen. Allen was determined to make a speech, so hoisted himself on an empty beer keg, and his hand shot up in the best dramatic manner, commanding silence, and silence was given.

"Gentlemen! I am here this evening to put forward for your approval very important and vital points for your consideration. The first that I deal with in this group, one that will make you weep tears of gratitude, is the fact that I have been promoted, promoted from a rear rank buck private to the position of runner. I know that you will feel gratitude at the fact that your Dominion has at last recognized the services of her best lead-swinger (cheers) and I want to say, gentlemen, I worked hard for this position. Like a Yankee millionaire I sold newspapers, chopped kindling, shined boots, and licked them, too. Who is there that will say that this army is not a democracy, where every man carries an an entrenching tool in his pack?" (Loud cheers.)

"And now, gentlemen, the next point I want to deal with is, shall we or shall we not allow the Yankees in this war? It is a vital point. The Yankees have licked us in everything, and put their noses into everything. Boxing, wrestling, golfing, tennis, and they tried to claim that Tommy Longboat must be a Yankee, because he didn't look like a white man." (Laughter) "And so here we are, gentlemen, we have a nice little war here, made up of a select group of people. And now, gentlemen, the Yanks are not going to leave us even that; they want to sit in, butt into this nice peaceable circle and disrupt it." (Cries of 'No, no'.) "Shall we allow it? Here we are fighting, and if

the Yanks came in, we will be talking. We Canadians have enough grief now trying to train the Australians the way they should go—you know the way I mean." (They did, and laughed hilariously.)

"We older peoples know how to conduct ourselves. Why, I'll bet these Yankees will play to win, for the sake of winning, just as they do in everything else, when, as you know, all Englishmen play only for the sake of the game." (Laughs.) "And we Canucks just play to keep the other people in their places. I would like to hear this right from some representative of that great nation. Is there any member of that nation here? Any Levinsky, Morosher, O'Hagan or Didtyoshen? If so, let him speak." He bowed gracefully and finished his beer.

The next morning I was the first to waken. Our billets were in an old shell torn building of some kind, with bunks made of chicken wire that sagged in the center. As I had been the most sober, I had taken the upper, while Allen and an American had crawled into the lower one with all their clothes and boots on.

Allen got to his feet, scratching and rubbing his eyes.

"Drunk again, Sobersides. What did I do last night?" I told him of his speech, and he laughed. "Let's eat. Gosh, I'm hungry."

So we hunted up the cook and had breakfast. We had hardly finished when the R. S. M. appeared.

"Well, of all the wrecks I ever saw, you two take the biscuit. Go and clean up and report at headquarters at ten. The O. C. wants to look you over."

We did our best, and in our eyes, looked quite presentable, but a sergeant in the imperial army would have had his heart broken if he had seen us. We were duly presented to the O. C. (the famous Daddy), but before we went in we heard him roaring at somebody, and quaked in our shoes. "Right turn, quick march, left turn, halt!" and we stood facing him. He gave us one look and grunted. His rheumatism was bad.

"Ho! So there are the men who knew how to run the war properly, eh?" Another grunt. "Well, I don't think either of you are any good as privates, so I am going to make you corporals. *Lance*-corporals. In fact, you there, Thor, are already one, though you probably didn't know it."

"What, sir?" I managed to gasp.

"Here it is. You were mentioned in dispatches, and given a King's Corporalship, reading from June 28, 1916. I don't know what the hell I ever recommended you for that for, but there you are!" Then his tone changed, and became a bit softer. "Now for God's sake, men, have a good time, but keep sober as much as you can. I'm glad to see you back." He stood up, shook hands with us, with what was, for him, a smile of welcome, and said, "Dismiss."

We dismissed, and stood outside staring at each other, goggle-eyed. The R. S. M. had a fiendish grin on his face. "You will knock the poor lance-corporals, will you? Now try it out on yourselves and see how you like it. Say, Thor, I want to congratulate you on your stripes. If you only knew it you are the luckiest beggar in the whole blooming army. Nobody can reduce you except by court-martial, and it has to be a field general at that. Why, you can get away with murder and they can't touch you."

"Is that right, that they can't really reduce me except by a field general?"

"Absolutely, old bean. There have been only about a dozen given in the whole war. You are a lucky beggar."

Allen didn't miss the chance, and said—

"Say, Sobersides, if they can't reduce you, just give him a poke in that fat belly of his, and see what happens."

CHAPTER VIII

NO MAN'S LAND

TWO DAYS afterward we went into the line on a working party. We were billeted in deep dugouts during the day, and worked all night digging communication trenches. A tribute must

here be paid to somebody, evidently a Canadian, higher up on the staff, who at last managed to make us really work. If there was one thing under Heaven that a Canadian soldier loathed, it was working parties, and even when sent out on them, he did as little as possible, and growled about it all the time. "I didn't join the blasted army to use a pick and shovel." And so it was a notorious fact that whereas on the Fritz side of the line, work would go on continuously, deep dugouts being built, trenches drained and made habitable, and so forth, on the Canadian side it was all the officers could do even to get necessary repairs made and the barbed wire strung up. The result was that many lives were lost through this laziness, but perhaps it was attributable to the fact that to work in this fashion impressed on us the *permanence* of it all, which we didn't like to credit.

We went out on our first working party. Oh, yes, the O. C. took jolly good care that everybody participated except the cooks. He took the battalion roll, not the company, so that we were included. We figured it was getting near our turn so we both reported sick. Allen already had had one trip, as his name was among the first alphabetically. But I was lucky, mine beginning with a T. But as there weren't enough after T, the A's and B's had to go out again with us. Allen managed to scare up a bad cold, while I affected rheumatism, but sad to say, it didn't work, for the doctor, a hard hearted and brainy man, gave us several 9s which we had to take then and there, and dismissed us with medicine and duty. In fact, he shouted as we left—

"Those pills will make you work harder tonight than you ever did in your sweet lives before." They did.

Our luck, if you call it luck, was an intelligent recognition on Byng's part that here he had no ordinary army. It was not composed of all classes, like the English, French and German, but one class preponderated, and that a class of intelligent, independent human beings. His greatest stroke of genius was the recognition of this fact. He treated us, as did Currie after him, as if we had brains and used them. We could work independently, and when shown what had to be done, and the way they thought it should be done, we could be left to do the rest ourselves. Now we were even told to expect heavy casualties, which was showing trust in the intelligence of our men. We took the Ridge.

For days now the air had been vibrating with the sound of the guns. Our guns were nearly wheel to wheel, and one would have thought that the sound of them would hearten us, but we knew that Fritz had concentrated more guns than ever before at Sanctuary, yet— Hadn't it been the same at the Somme? Wouldn't it be the same here? Didn't we know of the dugout forty feet below the level that would hold five hundred soldiers? Didn't we even hear rumors from a raiding party of trenches built in cement? Oh, yes, we knew that there would be a welcoming committee waiting for us. Our men were busy making preparations, private preparations, for the encounter, every one trying to get rid of the lice and get clean clothes, so that there would be smaller danger of infecting wounds.

The spirit of men in adversity is a miracle to behold. Imagine the men cheerfully doing all this in preparation for their own death or wounds. Yet it was so. Morale had never been higher. Cheerfulness and high spirits were abroad in the land. Some were getting letters ready to post, just in case. In billets at night, you could hear queer conversations.

There was the company pessimist, usually a man who was only cheerful when it was pouring rain, or the battalion was having a tough time of it in the line. Couldn't he then get great joy out of saying, "Didn't I tell you we would get it this trip, didn't I tell you? Well, what are you crabbing about then?" So one night he was getting primed for the occasion:

"That's right, get a letter ready to send home, but there won't be anybody left to post it, except the parson. You

wanna give it to the first Fritzie you meet, then it might get there."

Somebody shouted—

"Oh, for God's sake give us a rest."

Another voice chimed in:

"Say, Bert, will that froggie take any more blankets? I would like to get a bottle myself."

Laughs.

Some one said:

"There will be enough army blankets left in France after this war to keep the froggies warm for the next hundred years. I'll bet a dollar there aren't ten blankets in the whole company!"

More laughs, then the sergeant comes in.

"Say, haven't I told you guys about those damn' candles before?"

This is a chance for the pessimist, and he makes the most of it.

"Oh, Sergeant, I *am* surprised. How do you expect us to polish our brass in the dark?"

The sergeant gave a growl.

"Damn the adjutant, I want those lights out, or else some blankets put over the holes," at which somebody chortled noisily.

"If you will loan us some blankets we will be very glad to cover up all the ruddy holes."

"I thought so; I thought so." The sergeant's voice was half delighted at the chance to rub it in. "Flogged all your blankets for cognac, eh? Some day, some day, I am going to see Daddy and tell him to hold a kit inspection, and then you blighters can show your cognac, and see what you get!"

Another voice:

"I'll bet a dollar you haven't a blanket yourself. In fact I'll bet ten dollars, for I saw you down at that froggie's place not long ago."

The sergeant grinned.

"Well, anyway, I'll get lots of blankets after this trip. I'll have the whole lot of blankets to myself, and all the grub I wanna eat, too. I heard we go in tomorrow. Toodle-oo, you guys."

The sergeant left us; we were quiet.

CURIOUS as it may sound, we had got used to the thunder of the guns. So well, that in spite of the uproar, the first thought that sprang to my mind as we filed slowly, so slowly, into the line, was of the silence. Not a sound could be heard of human voices, but just the steady splash of slipping feet along a creaking and groaning duckboard walk. Once in awhile would come the low voice of the man in front: "Wire overhead," and I would mechanically pick it up and give it to the man behind. "Wire overhead, shell hole to the right," or "Shell hole to the left." All hilarity had left us and we were dogged and grim. There was a dirty job to be done, and we were going to do it.

The ghastly green of the flares thrown up at intervals showed me the waterproof cape of the man in front, streaming with rain, then in quick succession three red flares went up from Fritz's line. He was worried, or had seen something. Then came the long, dreadful *whizzzz* and shriek of shells aimed directly at us. We could hear them going into the ground with a thud, and apparently die without exploding.

We heard the thud of shells dropping just outside the trench, a sickening, deadening thud, that made your heart stand still, while you cowered momentarily against the wall of the trench. Then the shriek came, for if a shell is landing near you, you hear the shriek afterward, and if at a distance, the shriek comes first to your ears. Then came shouts from in front:

"Gas! Helmets! Put on your helmets, you fools, they were gas shells!"

I hunted blindly for the mask. Like many another silly ass, I carried an extra pair of dry sox in the holder and of course I tried to put the sox on as a mask, before I discovered my mistake. *Thud-thud-thud!* Thank God, I had it on at last, but I had caught then the odor, an odor to make me cough and water at the eyes. I prayed that it would work properly. What a fool I had been to miss that last inspection!

I tripped on something and fell. It was a body. Then another, and another, and still more figures writhing and groaning in a most horrible fashion, were before us, with stretcher bearers trying to get them out of the way. We *had to walk over them* and keep moving. Keep moving, keep touch, don't bother about those fellows. I staggered blindly on, wondering vaguely who they were. One I turned over was an officer, as I could tell by the cloth of the trench coat. Then came a halt, and there we stood in the thick of it, waiting for some traffic jam in front to be cleared up. Then command of "Gas masks off again." Air felt good. My face was dripping with sweat, my eyebrows were on fire, my mouth felt dry and huge, and tasted like alum; my heart was pounding.

We came to a blank wall where a figure stood like fate with hand outstretched. Turn to the right, on again, with the rain still pouring down upon us. Then another figure appears, who asks in a whisper who we are. Then Allen's voice in reply, sounding hollow and sepulchral, with the single word, "Runners," at which the figure points back.

We must turn back. If you want to see how easy that is, imagine a line of hundreds, even thousands, of men stretched behind you in a long narrow hole, about two feet wide, and you try and turn back to pass these, try and squeeze past, when they are loaded with machine guns, bombs, ammunition boxes and all sorts and varieties of extra equipment! We turned blindly, only to bump into the men following us, who tried to keep on going, while our little squad of runners began to cuss and squeeze past. All at once a voice, low but concentrated with passion, said—

"If you bloody runners don't shut that gab of yours, I'll come back there and tear you limb from limb," at which we subsided, pushed ourselves as close to the side as possible, and waited, to the accompaniment of a continual mutter of curses from those who were trying to pass us. At last the voice spoke again, "Get out of that trench; you guys should know better than to follow us. You are delaying the whole damn' show."

We meekly hoisted ourselves over the parapet, breathing curses on the lieutenant who was supposed to be taking us in, and crawled and stopped. You have to stop every time a flare goes up, which is very frequently. At last the intersection was reached, where we had turned to the right, and we jumped gladly back into the trench and, finding it clearer in this direction, we hurried on as quickly as circumstances would permit, about two miles an hour, till a faint light gleamed at our feet. I, being first, pushed aside the blanket, crept down several steps, and asked if this was H. Q. It was, and our friend the adjutant was there. He immediately asked—

"Where is Lieutenant Holworth?"

"Hasn't he arrived?" I asked in turn. Allen and I looked at each other; and another runner spoke.

"He must have been the one I fell over, and if it was, he's a stiff, sir, from the gas."

Out of six runners and one officer we had had the bad luck of losing the officer and two men. It was a bad beginning.

WE BOILED tea in silence. A question was pounding into my brain. It was bad enough to have the worry of your own soul, but a stabbing thought in my brain suggesting that I was a jinx that brought death to those about me, was worse than any hell.

There were thuds and steps on the stairs of the dugout, and the O. C, with the balance of the H. Q. and the company commanders, came in. The dugout was dimly lighted by many candles, and there were a roughly made table covered with maps, a telephone, piles of blankets, equipment and boxes thrown haphazard over the floor. There was a signaler standing at the phone making sure the wire was not broken by shell fire. A cook was busy in another corner getting the officers a meal, and another signaler with

the blue and white on his arm stood looking at the maps.

The company commanders gathered around the table with the O. C. while he pointed with his fingers at certain points on the maps.

I looked at my watch and saw that it was twenty past five. Zero hour was set at 6:40. Then came more steps on the stairs, and a brass hat appeared. More quiet talk followed around the table, and machine guns were mentioned again and again. Allen slipped over to me, nodded his head toward the group and whispered:

"They have the wind up about those guns all right. It looks as if Canada is going to increase her Roll of Honor tonight."

I whispered back—

"Do you think they will get across?"

"I don't think we will get more than the Ridge itself, if we get that," he answered. "But we haven't as much grief to handle as the 4th Division at the Pimple. Gosh, those guys are going to get it. If I was the O. C. I'd take it easy. He can't do any more anyway than wait. I suppose that brass hat came up to see why we were late getting in." I hadn't realized that, but the gas shells and resulting casualties had put us nearly two hours behind time, which meant corresponding lateness for all behind us.

Indeed we heard Daddy's voice delivering an impassioned harangue, cursing the artillery for not silencing an active German machine gun battery. His voice rose:

"You yourself told me yesterday that every gun would be out of action, and look at it, when a battery gives us three salvos! What the hell is the matter with the observation that that happens? How am I to know now how many of his damned batteries are still in action? If that damned sissified air force only had nerve to go out and take a look, they might have been silenced. And why pick out today of all days to go over? I'll bet it was because some of you brass hats thought nine was lucky. And if I come out with thirty per cent. you will send me enough damn' forms about it to keep me busy till the next war. Here it is snowing (The runners looked at each other. Snowing?) outside, it has been raining for weeks, but what does that matter? You men don't have to tramp through it. But my men do, and by God I will give that staff an earful when I get out!"

The staff officer left hurriedly, and I could imagine his report to the brigadier, and how *he* would go after the division commander, and so on, back to the corps.

There was silence for a moment, then a company commander spoke admiringly:

"By George, sir, I feel like giving you a medal for that. It is just what I thought, but didn't have the nerve to say." They laughed.

Allen and I were smoking in a corner, and presently the telephone rang and after many bellows and damns the adjutant caught the message. Another battalion was being sent in from supports to follow immediately after the first wave. We cursed to ourselves, for if the two battalions got mixed up it would be an awful job trying to sort out the officers in command.

The O. C. stood up, looked at his watch, and said:

"Listen! With that other outfit right behind us, we are going to get all mixed up, so why not begin to move at 6:30, get through the wire and stay there till 6:40. You will be better off, and it will give you a good start."

They agreed, and departed to their companies. There was nothing to do now but wait. It was 5:45 A.M. Fifty minutes yet. Daddy's fingers kept drumming on the table, and the adjutant walked up and down, biting his lips. The signaler at the phone was chewing gum like a regular "hello girl." The other signaler had to wait and do nothing unless the line broke, then it was his business to find it and repair the damage. One of the nerviest jobs in the whole war. The four of us squatted on the floor smoking and talking of everything except what actually was on our minds.

SUDDENLY the barrage was laid down, and the earth shook, while trickles of dirt kept falling between beams of the dugout. It kept growing louder until our ear drums were vibrating; then Fritzie's guns joined in and we heard the voice of arriving shells, some right on top of the dugout. The beams creaked and groaned with the strain, and I heard Allen's voice near me.

"God, Sobersides, wouldn't it be awful to be caught in this hole like a rat?"

My watch must have stopped. I looked at Allen's. 6:20. Time was rolling slowly.

Rolling, banging thuds, accompanied by moans, were heard on the stairs, and Allen and I dashed for the door, to pull the gas blanket aside, as a body rolled to our feet. We lifted him up and carried him nearer the candles and found he was badly hit. The O. C. came over and said:

"That's a B Company runner. Try and get the message."

While we busied ourselves putting his field dressing over a hole in his stomach, the adjutant tried to get the message, but the man was moaning, evidently unconscious. The adjutant spoke sharply:

"You, Thor, hurry along to B Company and tell them. Try and get the message. You have only ten minutes."

I threw off my equipment and ran up the stairs, only too glad to get away from those moans and that hole. The trench was jammed to suffocation with men, and one told me that it was blown in farther down. I heaved myself up on the parapet of the trench, and ran along the top. I say ran, but it was really a staggering, blinded, tripping, falling walk. I ran and ran and dived down into the trench, asking the first figure I saw—

"B Company?"

I was lucky; their dugout was only a few feet ahead. I turned into a bay, but it had disappeared, the whole trench was blown in, probably the dugout too, and in the dugout, the men. I crawled over but couldn't find the entrance, and asked another figure for an officer, and was told that a lieutenant was just down a little way, but the O. C. was buried with two other officers and the sergeant-major and a private. I daren't look at my watch in the flicker of the next flare, but hurried on, and at last found the lieutenant, very nervous, a new man in his first engagement, poor beggar, left to take charge of a company. He told me he couldn't do it, his nerve was gone. He kept twitching.

"Where's the other officer?" I asked. "Wounded? Oh, hell, is there a sergeant?"

He told me there was, an old original man, in the next bay, so I hurried on, to find him. He had heard about the O. C. but not about the lieutenant, and I said:

"Listen, Sergeant, you will have to take charge, the officer's lost his nerve." He nodded grimly in reply and we both looked at our watches.

"Can you get them over?" I asked.

"Leave it to me. I'll get this mob over, or bust," he answered.

It was now 6:39, and he left to hunt for runners, and the officer and I went back to H. Q. The trench was empty, or rather emptying, and the barrage was growing more intensive. We were off!

Then I noticed one of those things that can't be avoided in circumstances like these. The second and third waves began to file in from communication trenches, in preparation for their turn to go over. German machine guns had begun to rattle, and wounded began to fall back into the trench, and dead came slithering down also, to lie in the bottom, so that the trench became a hell, filled with dead and wounded, gasping and groaning and calling for help, while all the time the second wave came on, having to take its place, or hold up thousands of men and probably cost the first wave hundreds of lives. And on top of all this the runners and stretcher bearers and all the necessary adjuncts of war were trying to work in opposite directions in an area two feet wide and six feet deep.

The snow and rain were falling still. It was no time for sentiment. Iron shod feet clumped, pulled and kicked their way

clear over wounded and dying, one group determined to take their place and go over the top, the other groups just as determined in their way to get to dressing stations. It was no time for sentiment, as I say, but the wounded were naturally the weaker . . .

I heaved myself up out of that ghastly mess of living flesh and hurried on as if pursued by the devils of hell.

I FOUND the dugout at last. The O. C. was there, too, his face gray and haggard, and his hand tapping the table. I reported:

"The O. C. and officers of B Company were buried, sir. Lieutenant Struthers badly wounded besides, and that new officer's not very fit to take charge." Then, seeing his shoulders droop, I lied. That is, partly. "I saw Sergeant Hillier, sir, and he said he would take charge. He had already organized new runners and platoon commanders and went over with the company only five minutes late."

Such a look of relief overspread his face that I was glad I had lied, and anyway Hillier would get them over by hook or crook, maybe a little late, but he would get them over. The O. C. spoke.

"That's all, Thor. Is any attempt being made to get the officers and men out?"

I told him I didn't think there was, as B Company hadn't the men to spare.

"Oh, I see. All right, Thor." Then he turned to the adjutant. "Take a runner with you and try and find B Company, and if Hillier is doing all right, leave him alone, but if he needs you take charge, but for God's sake, take his advice. He has more experience than you."

I prayed that he wouldn't take Allen, but if I had known what was to happen later, I would have prayed that he did. He chose, instead, a tall, solemn faced Scotsman as his guide, and departed, after looking carefully at his automatic. The adjutant was always very picturesque, and he managed a dramatic exit even now, standing with the blanket half drawn aside and his hand on his gun as he said—

"Goodby, Colonel."

The Scotsman winked at us and disappeared. They were never seen again.

I looked around, after squatting down as comfortably as I could, and saw that the signaler who looked after the wire had disappeared, which meant the line was broken. The other one was standing at the phone, jingling the bell at regular intervals and listening intently, and judging by the look on his face, the other chap was a friend of his.

The cook was sitting in the corner, placidly reading a Sexton Blake story by the light of one candle. The regimental sergeant-major had appeared in my absence with the transport officer, and they stood talking to the colonel in low tones. The wounded runner had died, evidently, for he was laid off at one side with a rubber sheet thrown over him and his feet stuck up in the horrible fashion typical of the dead. Another runner had been posted, so Allen said, up at the entrance to stop wounded from coming down and jamming the dugout. I felt deathly tired and fell asleep.

I woke later to find my head pillowed on a pack. Allen was gone, and I started into wakefulness and looked around. The dugout was like a tomb. The O. C, myself and the dead were the only occupants. The O. C's head was in his hands, his eyes being closed, and I almost thought he must be dead too, but when I moved he started and said:

"Oh, you are awake, are you, Thor? Had a good sleep?"

I nodded, and looked at my watch. Nine o'clock. There was silence again, even the guns sounding quieter. I was trying to summon up courage to ask how things were going, but he spoke first.

"Well, Thor, as usual we have made a name for ourselves, all objectives taken except the Pimple by the 4th Division, but they will get that. We have captured the Ridge, but can't find B Company, and your friend Allen is looking for them. I haven't heard a word of them

yet. Our losses—" silence, and a sort of half moan— "our losses are pretty heavy. My boys deserve a V. C, every one of them. No one else on God's green earth could do it, except my boys." His eyes stared broodingly into space. "Those brass hats say we haven't discipline. Well, who could discipline boys like mine? I can't. Let them have a good time, let them play. My God, they haven't much time to live. What if they do get drunk, what if they can't form fours like a blasted machine? They can *fight*. By God, they can fight!" He woke to his surroundings with a start, and growled, "That's none of your business, Thor. You didn't hear that."

We waited. At last, steps on the stair, and I jumped up, holding the blanket, and as I waited to see who would come, my heart seemed to stop beating. Thank God, it was Allen. He gave the O. C. his message and came back to me.

"Gosh, you can sleep, Sobersides." The commonplace remark was enough. Allen was alive.

ALL AT once the dugout seemed to fill with officers, runners and N. C. O's and an excited jumble of talk began. The supports had come up, our H. Q. was to move, runners appeared from the other companies and to the general activity was added the ringing of the phone again. Everything seemed to be happening at once. The regimental sergeant-major reappeared with the transport officer and some man who worked in the orderly room. The second in command, it should be mentioned, had been killed in a previous trip, and no new officer was appointed. We got the command to gather up our equipment. We were on the move. Headquarters was to be moved to the old German Front Line in a dugout near Foley Farm, which was carefully pointed out to us on the map.

It was approaching ten o'clock when we came in, and the German guns were comparatively silent. There were no light shells to be seen, only coal boxes, the heavy ones that emit a dense black smoke. Even these were falling haphazardly, which made the situation worse as we didn't know where the next one would come. I surmised from this that Fritzie's light artillery was either captured or was retiring to a new position.

Here and there we could see bodies in our trench, or just over the top, sprawled in queer ways, and with the inevitable boots showing that they were dead. I did not know that feet had such expression until the war. Allen and I sat on the parados waiting for the O. C. We saw a long single line of men digging a C. T. trench, and another line laying a duckboard walk. We could see several hundred yards, as the ground rose slowly upward before our eyes, and lone figures appeared here and there staggering, walking; and scattered couples supporting one another denoted walking wounded coming out.

A gang of men was employed in desperately trying to pull an eighteen pounder field gun into a new position. Figures which we took to be runners were going hither and yon, and a staff officer, resplendent in his bright red tabs, made his appearance.

We watched with a sporting, detached interest a couple of wounded come in, one man badly hit, evidently in the leg, as he was supported by the other, and we could see the white splotch of a bandage. The other had got it in the head, and probably couldn't see very well. They were making slowly and desperately for the duckboard walk. Then the smoke of a shell hid them from sight for a time. Had they been knocked out? We watched with renewed interest for their reappearance. There they were, coming out of the smoke, still coming bravely on. Then another shell hid them from sight. There they are again!

At eleven o'clock we had scarcely gone twenty or thirty feet away from the dugout. Suddenly, with shrieks and roars that drowned out all other sounds and left us blind, gasping, choking, vomiting wrecks, the barrage opened, a German creeping

barrage. It followed us as we made for the line, till we lost all sense of direction and time.

We clung hand to hand and staggered on, and on. A thousand demons pursued us, mud flew up and covered us, and water splashed us as shells plunged into holes nearby us. Bathed in sweat, mud and water, gasping, choking, praying, swearing on at any cost.

Then Allen fell, a dead weight on my arm. Killed? I groped for him, seeing him dimly through the smoke, and knelt beside him, still afraid to let go of his hand for fear of losing him in the smoke. Like one demented I felt feverishly over his body. Head all right, chest, stomach O. K, then his legs. I breathed a sigh of relief. I could feel his heart pounding, pounding. Oh, Allen, Allen, my friend.

At last I found a huge hole, flesh blown clean out of his leg above the knee, but the bone untouched. When my hands touched that ghastly hot flesh they became slippery with blood. Arteries, arteries, what is it you do in case of arteries?

Some long forgotten lesson of tying above the wound came to me. Damn that smoke! I can't see what I'm doing. I haven't any cord! Oh, what a fool! Everybody should carry a cord. Oh, I have it! The tape on my puttees! I pulled it off, soaking wet and covered with mud, but I found the tape. Again the search, for a knife this time. Again lacking. Had Allen one? I reached into his trousers pocket, already wet and sticky with blood, and found one, then ripped the trousers far above the hole and tied the tape tightly, desperately, above the wound. His heart beats seemed to grow weaker. Damn that smoke!

My field dressing next, too small, but put it on anyway. Then a tremendous heave, and I have him on my shoulders, but I'm sinking in the mud! I can't lift my feet. Damn that smoke, what shall I do? *What shall I do?* Pull him? No, his leg would drag in the mud.

I have it, tie his puttees to his feet and pull him feet up. Again that agonizing work, and a shell drops so close that the shock knocks me over, and a shower of dirt and stones strikes me. Up again, while I pulled off my tunic and tied it around his head, then attached the puttees. Then, pull. Damn you, Thor, pull! Slowly, agonizingly, and prayerfully, we moved. Don't stop, you fool! You will drop. Keep moving, keep moving! Just a hundred yards and maybe you will get out of it and save Allen. Move, move, keep moving!

My breath was coming in short sobbing gasps. Uphill and down again. Be careful of the water. Don't drown him. My feet seemed fairly to sink into the ground, and each step required a tremendous tug upward to release them. Oh, God, I am done. See, I can't lift my feet. I can't budge. I dropped, sobbing, beaten, unable to move, and felt myself sinking slowly, inevitably, into that bloody mud.

CHAPTER IX

CRY HAVOC!

I AWOKE into a hell of pain, my body stiff and racked, shot and seared through and through. My head was aching. As I turned over I found myself lying in several inches of water. Allen was beside me, his face as pale as a sheet, lying motionless and stiff, and his boots were up. I raised myself cautiously, every move adding another twinge, and saw a whole line of us, seemingly endless, with boots, boots, boots, all toes up to the heavens. I was directly beneath a stump of a tree, and on this was drooping, like a drowned cat, a red cross flag. But no one moving was in sight.

Then my ears began to take notice of sounds. Over there somewhere a fight was going on, a hand to hand affair, to judge by the continuous explosion of hand grenades. My dazed and stupid brain was coming back to life and I saw a figure coming along a path, a real path. Leaning forward, he was carrying some one; and other figures followed in rapid succession. Our wounded coming back.

Then a long line of men trying to run. Germans, prisoners. I could tell that by the lone figure in the rear, with rifle and bayonet, who was keeping them on the run, trying to get them away before Fritz attacked again . . .

Curse those pains. Stretcher bearers appeared now, poor devils, and the badly wounded. I looked at my watch. Half past twelve. Is that all it is? I wonder if Daddy knows where the line is? Everybody is busy looking after the wounded and have no time to notice me, so I start hobbling along the path and every little while I have to get off to allow somebody to pass.

At last I came to the edge of the Ridge itself. Good heavens, what a hill! On this side the Ridge goes sharply down for at least one hundred and fifty feet, and a magnificent view is before one. I could even see the German artillery pulling out at a gallop, and halfway down khaki figures scurrying here and there among the trees, and I caught the glint of bayonets.

I could see the three waves distinctly, the first almost down to that little village, in fact in it now, for the smoke and pop of hand grenades could be seen and heard. The second wave was at the bottom, advancing slowly, looking into holes, dugouts, anywhere, for possible overlooked machine guns. The third was halfway down, but broken, and looking for the wounded, a continual stream of which were passing up a road over to the right. British and Germans all mixed together.

Directly off to the right I saw a machine gun, and headed over that way, for that was where I might get information.

I CAME up close to the gun, which was mounted on the lip of a shell hole, and saw three men, all brigade machine gunners. Their numbers told me that half their crew was either killed or wounded. They were taking it easy, one lying on some belt boxes, another snoring, while a third, a corporal, was carefully cleaning the barrel of the gun with a ramrod. It looked almost ludicrous, with battle, murder and sudden death below, to see these men going about their business as though on a hunting expedition.

They were covered and caked with mud, but the gun itself was spotless, and steam was coming out of the water jacket, showing that it must have been firing a short time ago. I spoke to the corporal—

"Say, Corp, do you know where the C. M. R's are?"

He looked up sharply, saw my runner's armlet which I had slipped over my shirt, and said—

"Trying to save yourself a trip down below?"

I managed a grin.

"Don't jump on the judgment so quick," I answered. "I just came to life a few minutes ago, and I don't feel like going down, because I am sure I couldn't get up that hill again."

He eyed me up and down, and I must have looked a wreck, no puttees, no tunic, and just an armlet to denote my business. Then a most delightful warm hearted grin spread over his face, and he said:

"If an English officer ever saw you like that, he would be sure to say, 'There you are, those Canadians can't even keep clean in a battle.' "

I had to laugh, and sat down painfully.

"Well," I said, "this doesn't get me anywhere. Daddy will be tearing his hair out because we haven't reported, so where the devil are they?"

He pointed down.

"There they are, cleaning out the village. Say, a guy told me that there is an old French couple down there, so they decided to take it by hand, instead of turning the guns on it. That's our army all over, throwing away twenty or thirty lives to be sentimental! Say, you aren't any good to go back." He looked at me sharply. "What you need is to go back to that dressing station and stay there. Listen, that guy over there needs a rest bad, so I'll send him in your place. Then he can get his rest."

After he had gone, the corporal turned to me and said—

"I'm sorry I can't help you back to first aid, but I guess you will get there if you take it easy."

So I started back to find Allen, and after traversing the same area I had come over, I reached the spot where I had left him, and found a scene of great activity in progress. Some infantry had been detailed off and were hustling all the stretcher cases into a dugout near at hand, while the walking wounded were being sent out to the duckboard walk. This I learned from an infantry sergeant of another battalion who was superintending operations. There had been so many casualties that it was impossible to move them all through the mud until some sort of walk was made.

I looked around for Allen but could not see him, so I asked where the dugout was, and followed the line. It was an old German dugout, of huge proportions inside, and strongly built. They would be comparatively safe here for the night anyway. A doctor and staff of stretcher bearers were also there, so I went up for examination and found that many small slivers of steel had peppered me from top to bottom. The doctor said he could do nothing, and that I would have to go to the hospital, but not to try to walk out, as that would work the slivers in farther.

So I joined the badly disabled in the dugout and hunted for Allen. I found him at last in a side passage, a very quiet place, for every case on the stretchers had been doped into silence.

Allen was sleeping and breathing easily. He had been given the usual shot against gangrene, and as far as I could judge, although weak, he might have a chance. An idiotic prayer came to my mind, and I went down on my knees.

I felt relieved at least, and went back again to the lighted room where the doctor was, borrowed a knife and tried to cut out as many slivers as possible, though my legs especially were very painful. The doctor saw me again and gave me a couple of pills which he said would ease it a little.

The dugout was filled now, packed as closely as possible, and there was that peculiar smell of blood and chloroform. I shuddered as I saw parts of arms and legs and hands cluttered in a corner that one of the men was cleaning out. It had been necessary to make some quick operations. I lay down and slept.

WHAT wakened me was the shaking of the dugout, caused by the arrival of heavy shells. I crawled painfully out of the little side passage where I had been sleeping, as I was worried about Allen. It was very difficult making my way in the semi-darkness, among the many forms. But I found Allen and he was awake and lying with an intent look on his face, not of fright but of acute interest. When he saw me he smiled and said weakly—

"Hello, Sobersides."

I said:

"What's the matter, Allen old boy? How are you feeling?"

"Oh, not so bad. Where the devil did you come from, and where are your clothes? How did I get here?"

I had to grin in spite of the dizziness in my head.

"Well, you poor old sucker, I came with you, or rather you came with me, and I had to loan you my clothes to keep you from drowning. But why all this sudden interest?"

"I've been listening to that damn' row going on upstairs for the last half hour, and am wondering how long this dugout will stand it. Being wounded isn't so bad, but to be buried— Well, I don't like it."

The thought paralyzed me. I too listened, then said—

"I'll be back in a minute."

I crawled away to the entrance, one of my legs being now practically numb and not much good. At the entrance room there was a scene of activity that made my heart pump with gladness. We were being evacuated, several men removing

the groaning figures from their stretchers and where they lay on the ground, and lifting them as gently as possible on to the narrow stairway. The sound of groans cut me to the heart, but it had to be done. They had to crawl up the stairs themselves, as these were too narrow for the men to be carried up.

The doctor was giving each man a look as they were carried by him. Some he motioned to be put back, to others he gave a pill and bade them godspeed.

Several minutes later little streams of dirt were running from the roof in places here and there. The men were getting farther and farther away now, and nearer to Allen. Would he—could he make the stairs? Thirty steps. The men hurried, carrying their burdens swiftly, and giving furtive glances toward the roof as they went. We should have known better, for if there is one place Fritz would have the range on, it would be his own dugouts, and he knew we would probably use them. Weren't we fools? I watched for Allen, unnoticed myself, and at last he came.

My heart stopped as the doctor looked, held his place, motioned him back. Oh, God, he wasn't worth taking out! The thuds grew heavier, and at last the right one came—an ear splitting roar, a smell of cordite, the rumble of dirt down the stairs, a crash of timbers followed by the extinguishing of the candle, and I was knocked to the ground by a burst of air, and lay there.

I thought I was dead. For a second or more there was silence, then a heart-rending, ear splitting scream sounded, then again it came! Oh, God, I am done—done—a sobbing gasp—silence. Then something scraping along the floor. I wasn't dead! I mastered all the forces of my will and courage.

Damn you, hands, stop trembling! Now feel around, and see what you touch. Ugh—I vomited, tried again, then heard a voice.

"Is anybody alive there?"

Thank God, somebody else. My eyes were weak and wavering.

"Well then, come on over here. Can you crawl?"

"Yes," I replied; then the voice said: "Wait. I'll light my torch."

A groan, the flare of a torch, and I crawled toward the light, each movement agony. I heaved myself over several bodies lying between. At last I reached him. It was the doctor. He threw the torch downward, and I saw that his legs up to his thighs were buried in a mound of loose dirt that was growing bigger and bigger. His voice came again between sobs.

"Can you—you—pull me out? I—I'm afraid I can't help. The scissors—they're buried in my shoulder."

A sudden burst of energy on my part, drawn from God knows where, and I dug feverishly away at the dirt with my hands, and yet had time to say, "Put out the torch, you may need it." I worked on. Was the dirt going? I didn't know, but just scraped and scraped, while sweat poured out, and I forgot all my own pains.

"Flash the torch, Doc."

The light came on and I reached for his shoulders, grabbed him by the hair and pulled with all my might. He moved. Then another heave, and another, then a pull sideways on his legs, and he was clear. My head was throbbing, and I was gasping with the effort for breath, but I heard his low-breathed "thank you."

I took the torch and crawled over to the boxes where he had been operating, and finding candles, lighted them. He was moving slowly toward me, hunching along on one elbow, between gasps, and I helped him, hurried him over. The scissors had gone in open. They couldn't go much farther, though one point had slipped beneath some bones.

"Better take a pill, Doc."

He pointed to his pocket, and finding one, inserted it and waited for a few minutes.

"All right," he said. "Pull—quick!"

I wrenched them out, and he moaned, then whispered—

"Iodine."

I found the bottle on the table and poured the whole thing over the cuts. I hunted and found a plaster half buried, and tried my best to draw the flesh together before binding it. He was moaning quietly, but at last I got it, then the bandage, which I wrapped securely at his request.

I gave him another pill.

"Rum." I looked blank. "Bottle."

Oh, there it was. I took a good big swig first, as I didn't want him to see my trembling hands—hands over which I seemed to have lost control. I trickled some down his throat, then he said painfully—

"Leave me . . . rum . . . pills . . . others."

I understood. It was a big waterbottle, so I took another swig, and started out, the fiery stuff making me feel better, giving me more nerve. I looked around. The entrance halfway up had caved in, evidently with a direct hit, and there was a jumble of boards, beams and mud, with here and there a trickle of water. A half open hand jutted out from under the dirt, and I felt the pulse, but it was dead, quite dead.

Then I took a thorough survey of the bodies, about fourteen in number. Five were alive, and I went down to the passage and found several more, but the shock of the explosions had clearly finished them, as they were all dangerously wounded cases.

Allen—my God, where was Allen? I had forgotten.

I hurried back as fast as my legs, including the numb one, would carry me, and rolled over the bodies in haste. I found him at last, close to the door, but to the right and against the wall—motionless—stiff—dead. No. Thank God! He was smiling . . . smiling—but he was dead . . .

I was so tired, and my body ached with wounds.

"Every one I have loved, every friend I had, has been killed. My wife, Hartley and now Allen, my brothers. Why, oh, why am I always left?"

CHAPTER X

MARKED FIT

IT WAS a beautiful day, and the sun shone full upon me as I awoke from a glorious sleep, feeling tired and yet not tired, just lazy perhaps. I had no desire to move, but I felt glad to be alive once more, and absolutely content, like a cat on a rug before a fire.

I looked around and found myself in a large room, then with the reawakening of memory I felt myself for bandages, and was relieved to find my face free, and my jaws all right again. Nothing wrong there, thank Heaven. I became conscious of a slight throbbing in my legs and a hint of pain in the region of my stomach, but neither was anything to worry myself over, so I began to interest myself in my surroundings.

I saw rows of beds on either side of mine. I moved my head, and instantly became full of delight that I could do so. I could smell some kind of oil, but felt delightfully clean and fresh. When I turned my head I saw a man in the next bed playing solitaire, and when he noticed me watching him he came over and said—

"Hello, Canada, how do you feel now?"

I grinned and said—

"Fine!"

Then we both grinned, rather puzzled what to say next. He was in hospital blues, a nice looking chap, and fair, plump and blue eyed, with those china blue, placid, Saxon eyes. His arm was bandaged tightly at the wrist or just above it.

"By Jove," he said, "the nurse told me to tell her as soon as you came to life again." And he hustled off.

I was hungry, very hungry. When was it I had eaten last? Oh, yes, in the dugout, before Allen and I had left. Allen—oh, well, maybe he is better off. The nurse appeared just then and luckily diverted my mind. She was one of the bustling jolly kind, and she said—

"I suppose you want breakfast now, or dinner, or probably supper, or maybe all three."

I assured her I wanted all three, but added—

"I have an idea that all I will get is a glass of milk and a bun."

She smiled.

"So you have been in hospital before?"

I admitted the fact and told her laughingly that I had been to France twice, and had a total of two trips in the lines and one working party. She looked amazed, and I, delighted to have an audience, went on:

"That's a fact, sister, my total time in the line isn't five days yet. What day is this?" She told me it was April 17th. I could account for the 9th and 10th, but the rest was lost somewhere. April 17th!

"How about it, sister? Do I get anything stronger than milk?"

She looked at my chart and said—

"You are a special, so I will see what special means for you."

The nurse came and put a rest behind my back, then brought me breakfast, a real breakfast too, boiled eggs, toast, tea and strawberry jam! It was a feast. I lay back after it was over, content.

I had lots of time to think, in the ensuing days, but I was in a quandary, because I actually didn't know *how* or *what* to think.

THE DAYS passed slowly, their monotony relieved somewhat by the arrival of mail which was catching up again with me. The army had evolved a wonderful system of tracing a man, and mail that had followed me to England, back to France, and then back to England, finally reached its destination. I noticed that it was marked "killed", "missing", "believed killed", all of which had been scratched out, and "wounded, England" written upon it, which meant that they had to find me in one of the hundreds of hospitals in England.

There were several letters from Dad; he said Mother was very worried about me, but had recovered from the shock of the deaths of my two brothers, and seemed much easier in mind. Dad himself was fine, but had retired from the army, as his rheumatism was very bad.

There was a letter from my old friend Mrs. Braithwaite, who had heard that I was killed, and then that I was alive after all. Then there was a letter from my wife's mother, saying that she had just heard that I was on my way to France again, wishing me godspeed, and asking if I would accept a little gift (ten pounds) and a parcel she was sending. There was hope for her son's eyesight after all, she said, in an operation that the king's private surgeon was going to undertake. I prayed that it might be successful.

Another letter was from Hartley's mother, who had also heard that I was on my way back to France, and if this was true, she said, would I do an old lady and a mother a good turn and try to locate the grave of her son, so that she could visit it after the war.

Then there was my mother's letter, telling me how she had heard of my death but couldn't believe it, and how, sure enough, they had received my telegram next. She thought it queer that the Canadians appeared to be in so many battles, and had so many casualties, and now they were talking of conscription. Was I getting my parcels? Did the salted peanuts keep fresh?

A letter arrived from Allen's wife, and I give it from memory, as the contents are still written on my mind. She had traced me, after hearing of Allen's death, and this was what she wrote:

Dear Mr. Thor:

I have just received the news about my husband. I received a telegram last night stating that he was "missing believed killed" and another this morning stating definitely that he was killed.

I suppose that you will be surprised to hear from me, but my excuse is the fact that Allen, in his letters, was always speaking of you. I believe he called you Sobersides, did he not? He called me Spud. He had the habit of calling any one he liked by some nickname, always did, so when I heard him calling you that, I understood that you must be very good friends, and that if he was killed you wouldn't be far away. He was a scalawag, a dear lovable scalawag, a vagabond in life. But he made me a woman,

and made me see the heights that I never could have reached but for him. I loved him, and sometimes I think that in his way he loved me too. Did he ever speak of loving me? Could you—would you write and let me know? . . .

I tore the letter into tiny fragments, stared at the wall—stared, stared, stared.

I answered her letter next day, told her how he had died, and lied, of course, but still it was justified. I told her he had been taking a message and had been wounded but had kept on until the message had been given into the hands of the O. C. and how he then fell exhausted. That he had been sane and free from pain at the end, had called for me, as I had been in the dugout when he had come in, and given me a message for her. "Tell, her, Sobersides, I was always hers, always, just as she is mine. We can't part. I love her." That was my message to his wife, scarcely coherent, perhaps, but still the best I could manage.

The next day I was allowed up. It was May, and two weeks afterward I received my board from the doctors, and was marked fit. I had twenty-eight scars on my body. The doctor told me afterward that they had received notice to examine all Canadians, and discharge from hospital any of those considered nearly fit, as they were needed in France, every battalion being under strength. I sat stupefied when I got the news. I could not believe it, yet there it was; back to France again.

I had thought I was finished this time, and had hopes of seeing Canada again, and home. Back to France? Twice I had missed it now, twice, two out of three; the third time meant death.

When I had my picture taken next day I felt as though I were being measured for my coffin.

CHAPTER XI

LUELLA

I GOT leave for ten days and decided to take it in Brighton, as I didn't want to go to London for fear I might meet relatives of my wife. I did not feel like bothering them, and again, it was all over now, and aside from imposing upon them, I would remind them of things.

For the first few days at Brighton all went "according to Hoyle." Then I met Luella.

I was sitting in the lounge when her mother or aunt or whatever she was, came over and addressed me. She gushed. There is nothing worse under heaven than a gushing woman, especially an American one.

"I hope you will excuse my boldness in addressing you," she said, "but I noticed that you are in the Canadians, and I wondered if you were an American, as I have heard that there are Americans in the Canadian army."

I tried to be insulting, to see what would happen, and said politely:

"No, Madam. I am afraid I am a Canuck. But we have Jews, Russians, Chinese and negroes and every other nationality."

She gave me a very sharp look, but still managed to smile, and say:

"Oh, but I didn't come over to argue with you over national names. I noticed that you have served in France twice. Was it very exciting?"

I admitted that it was.

"It is really a terrible war. My husband and I are over here on business, and it is really terrible how he is working himself to the bone for the cause of the Allies."

I managed a polite question.

"Is he in munitions?"

"Oh, nothing so terrible as that. He is a broker, selling things for the manufacturers."

"Oh," I said, "that's what we call a commission broker, in Canada."

My remarks must have touched a sore spot, for she broke out:

"Oh, of course he's making money; but he *is* working hard, and no one will ever appreciate the work he has done. And of course he has bought British war bonds."

"Oh," I said.

"Doesn't it look as if the Americans will have to come into the war? You

know the Allies are becoming very anxious and pessimistic about winning, aren't they?" she queried.

I admitted the charge, looking down at my stripes.

"But of course if the Americans do come in, the Germans will surely lose."

I managed another "Oh", and then, as she rambled on I grew very hot under the collar.

There was silence for a minute. Then her niece came over mincingly and asked:

"What are you people so interested in? You have been talking for the last fifteen minutes. I suppose Auntie has been holding forth on the great American nation?"

I blushed.

"Now, Luella—" her aunt broke in.

Presently I suggested a walk, and when we got outside Luella said:

"I am sick and tired of Auntie and her perennial arguments. As for myself, I think there is a lot to be said on both sides." She was ready to be herself, she tossed her head, and I liked her, she seemed so like a thoroughbred horse.

I laughed.

"Right on the head, Yankee, but let's talk of something else."

She changed to a coquette, languishing, demure, leading me on, then jumping away. The hunt was on. We went to the movies—the cinema—and she sat leaning close to me.

We had supper, and it was while we sat there that an argument began. Equality of women. Did I believe in equality of women? Darn it, I saw an abstruse discussion before me. I assured her that I thought women should have the same rights as men, and not so many as they had now. She flushed, her chin went out, and she began, while I was trying to think of something I read about the suffragettes, but all I could remember was that they had fought policemen.

We walked the promenade, and bewilderingly she changed her mood again; this time she was very much in need of a man to cling to, to lean upon, as she expressed it.

Next day we went for a walk, and I was careful to be impersonal, joking, careless.

We sat on a lonely part of the beach, but I kept my distance and smoked. She was puzzled but, not admitting defeat, she grew more attentive.

And so that day passed, and the next, and the next. My leave was nearly up. We were together all of one day, and she had been mostly quiet and not inclined to be playful when I suggested that I must leave soon. Evening came, and she suggested a long walk in the country, to which I agreed.

We took the tram to the end of the line and then walked. It was a beautiful night for walking. I took her arm as we sauntered along, and she was yielding, soft. I felt my victory. She made a misstep, and my arm went around her to catch her.

In silence we walked home. Somehow my ideas of her were changed, and even of women in general. Beneath all their frumpery trickery I saw a fierce, primitive directness which I had to respect.

IT WAS June when I was discharged from Convalescent and sent back to the reserve battalion. I stopped for an hour or so in Brighton on the way, and there met several men from my battalion in France. There were many reunions, and every one told me the same story, of being boarded and pushed back into the units before they were fit.

Of course we had drinks, and I arrived at camp with a fighting jag on.

The next morning we were all hauled up to orderly room. The others went in first, and were soaked fourteen days' pay each, and confined to camp until the next draft left for France. They were laughing as they came out, and winked at me as I stood there, hat off, waiting my turn, and one of them said:

"Well, my debt to the blinking government is piling up. I owe them a year's pay now, and will owe them two years' before that draft."

"Prisoners, 'shun! Right turn, quick march, left turn! Halt, left turn!"

"Private Lionel Thor, No. 51934 (I pricked up my ears at the 'private') charged with disorderly conduct and breaking furniture in the orderly room, assaulting Sergeant Squire in the same orderly room, in contravention of the King's Rules and Orders, Chapter—Paragraph—Sub-paragraph—"

I looked at the officer. By Jove, they had changed O. C's, and who should it be but my fat friend of the machine gun section! Involuntarily I grinned, just as he grinned and held out his hand.

"Hello, Thor. I thought you were a stiff. Where have you been?"

I was delighted to see him, and started to tell him of all the chaps, when the sergeant coughed and said—

"Pardon me, sir, we are in session."

The O. C. started.

"Oh, yes, Sergeant, quite right; quite right. We must follow routine. Prisoner, what have you to say for yourself?"

I had been carefully primed by one of the others the night before, who had been going through for law, and had studied the King's Rules and Orders, and said:

"I must protest, sir, against being put under close arrest. I believe I am entitled to an escort consistent with my rank, sir."

The O. C. looked startled.

"When the devil did you get stripes?"

"I have been back to France since you saw me last, sir, and while there I have been confirmed in the rank of corporal by both Divisional and King's Orders."

The sergeant muttered—

"King's Corporal—he's the first I've ever seen!"

And another officer standing behind the O. C. whispered something. The O. C. was grinning now, and he said:

"Well, all I can see is we will have to adjourn court until we see what you can do with a King's Corporal. And by the way, Thor, I have a little surprise for you. We have been trying to locate you for some time. Court adjourned! Prisoner, left turn, quick march, left turn, halt!"

I sat down on a bench outside and smoked placidly. The sergeant looked thunderstruck for a minute, then said, "Guard dismiss," and "Corporal, you come back, you are to act as escort for Corporal Thor." I was sitting on top of the world. Gosh, it was good to give the army one in the eye like that. I chuckled.

"I'll bet a dollar they are sweating in there, trying to find out what the hell you do with a King's Corporal!"

It was one of my carefully cherished secrets, for when Daddy had promoted me in France, he had recommended that my rank be confirmed for my work at Sanctuary. It was very seldom that such a recommendation ever went through, but it was given by the King, and though it only gave you one stripe, that one stripe had the protection of the King himself, and the owner could not be reduced except by the highest army court-martial. But of course one could be fined. However, even that had no effect in France, where you were paid only thirty francs a month field pay, and that by paymasters who visited the battalion at intervals, and just gave out the money, whether you were in debt or not. Even the sergeant had to laugh.

The door opened, and somebody said—

"All right, Sergeant, show him in."

Tubby, as they called my old officer, was looking very judicial and solemn, but his eyes were twinkling. I stood at attention, and I was curious to know what solution he had found.

"On looking over your papers from France, Corporal Thor, we find your statement verified, that you are a Corporal by Divisional Order, and not only that, but we also find that when this particular crime was committed there is doubt as to whether you were actually on the strength of this unit, as your papers have not yet arrived from Epsom. Therefore, until this question is decided, it is not in our power to try you, as you may still be attached to Epsom for discipline and rations.

"Until this moot question, therefore, is settled, I find that you will be placed

under open arrest until such time as we can give you your well merited punishment. What would happen if every old C. M. R. who came back here should beat up the orderly room clerk, simply because he also is a C. M. R. but had not gone to France? There *may* be weighty reasons for his being kept in England! There is absolutely no justification for such an unprovoked attack. You yourself have offered none, but simply protest a technicality of the law about your detention. This can be immediately cleared up, however, if you will state your willingness to accept any decision I may make.

"Are you willing therefore to go ahead with this trial and accept any punishment that I may inflict? It will save a tremendous amount of letter writing, and your course is clear; you can either stay under open arrest indefinitely, or accept any punishment which I may see fit to inflict."

"What the devil are you getting at?" I thought as he spoke. "You can only fine me, anyway, and make me pay the damages, and I can't get to town if I accept open arrest." So I said, "I may say, sir, that you have practically charged me with a crime without allowing me to make a defense, but, as you say I haven't any, I am willing to accept your sentence."

"I fine the prisoner seven days' pay, and also order that any damages should be deducted from his pay. Prisoner dismissed."

I managed to keep solemn. Good heavens, it was worth that. The O. C. came out as I was chuckling over this, and said:

"Say, Thor, drop over to my hut this afternoon. I would like to see you."

I saluted very smartly.

"I will be there, sir."

I saw Tubby that afternoon in his hut, where he was waiting for me, alone. We had a drink, then seated ourselves comfortably. I could see that he had some question to decide, and was unable to do so. At last he said:

"Well, Thor, I may as well break the news to you that I was referring to this morning. You are to receive a Military Medal, and a French Medal of some kind. We are holding a review next week, when some big bug will inspect us, and you and others will be presented. I got the M. C. and D. S. O. myself, though what the devil for, I do not know."

"Why—I—I—what do *I* get a medal for?" I stuttered. "I didn't do anything." He grinned.

"That's probably why you are going to get it. The doctor, you remember, who was in the dugout with you, recovered; in fact he is coming down next week to see you. He blabbed the whole works. You'd better have a drink; you look as if you need it . . . I suppose there aren't many fellows left of the old outfit, back in the battalion, are there?"

I shook my head gloomily. His last words as I left were—

"Aren't we a pair of damn' fools to go back?" I heartily agreed with him.

IN DUE course I was presented with my medals by some "high mucky-muck" who fought the war in England, and hadn't even been in the "Battle of Shorncliffe." He said it was a pleasure to meet a brave man, and I felt like saying, "You should change your company;" but thought I had better not. I liked the doctor, on making his acquaintance in circumstances more normal than those of our buried dugout. I found he had lost his arm, and wondered if it was because I had pulled the scissors out wrong. He held my hand firmly for a second, dropped it and mumbled something about my having guts. He said he could get me a bombproof if I wanted it and watched me with a queer look while I answered:

"Every one seems to be making a point of giving me a bombproof. Why, if I stayed in England I would be drinking myself to death from boredom; so I'm going back."

"I thought you would," was all he said.

He slipped me ten quid when he left, saying as he did so that he figured that

was about what he was worth. I lost it and the French medal at poker the next night, so I thought I had better send the M. M. home to Mother, as a souvenir from her son.

The O. C. was not to be outdone, however, in making my last stay in England as comfortable as possible. I was made a military cop. I should explain a distinction. There were Military Police and Military Cops. The former were the ones commonly called Red Caps, and were permanent; that is to say they were given special pay and allowances, to act in the same capacity in the army as the police did in civil life. They were owned body and soul by the government, and as such were looked down upon by the soldiers. They never fought anybody except their own countrymen, in soldier riots, and they never interfered with Canadians unless they absolutely had to, to save their faces, or in military prisons to which the soldiers were sent.

Later, when there were so many disabled men that the Canadians did not know what to do with them, they had the bright idea of putting an armlet on them and saying, "Now you are a policeman," and rather vaguely leaving it at that. Nobody knew what they were supposed to do, and nobody cared. What did it matter? The poor blighter wasn't fit to go to France, and wasn't bad enough to send home. He couldn't attend drills, so they merely made him a "cop" and when he asked what he had to do, they waved their hands and said, "Keep order."

So, with such prerogatives, and free trips to Brighton and no drills, I thought it was really thoughtful of the O. C. to make me a military policeman.

Two weeks later we began to be examined for a draft.

I wrote to Luella.

THREE days later, as I was busily trying to catch up with my mail, which was weeks behind, and telling them at home to begin to send parcels to my battalion in France again, she came. It was a sunny day, I remember, and a chap came and told me I was wanted in the orderly room, so I trotted up, and there she was, waiting for me.

"Can you walk to the village?" she asked.

I told her I could, so we started off, and as I still wore my M. P. badge we passed the guards all right. We exchanged only a few commonplaces until we got to the village. Then to my surprise she led me off the beaten track past the church, to a little gray cottage, outside of which stood a runabout car of some kind or other. Her car. She took my arm and almost danced as she said:

"What do you think of that? You and your Brighton! Look what the famous American dollar has done!"

She took me inside the cottage, and I discovered a wonderful little place, with a clock ticking and quaint cupboards and tables about. I looked my amazement.

"How in heaven's name did you get this?"

She was greatly excited now, and talked so fast I scarcely could make it all out.

"I arrived last night," she told me, "and found out about this place, and the owner's husband is off to war, so I rented it, lock, stock and barrel, and she has taken herself to London. So here we are. Now, you sit here and smoke while I get lunch. And for goodness sake take off that tunic and belt and be comfortable."

I did as she bade me, glad to note that I had on a Canadian fatigue shirt underneath, which was quite smart, for the army. And, by Jove, she had even thought of beer, so I had a mug. What bliss!

Such a lunch as it was! I ate ravenously of pie, raisin pie, and strawberry jelly, mashed potatoes, chops, thick gravy, everything—with tea. I was prepared for coffee, as she was a Yankee, but she gave me tea, such watery tea as they make, and I am afraid I was very unmannerly in showing I didn't care for it. She asked me—

"Can you make tea?"

I replied that I could. So she took

me out into the kitchen and I made it properly. The meal was then perfect.

When it got later I had to go back to camp to see if word had arrived about the draft, so she went with me and stood in the shadow of a hut while I inquired. But no word had come, thank heaven, so we went home. I showed myself willing to leave at the doorstep, but she would not let me, and said I was going to stay, come what might. I was dumbfounded, and glad.

Six o'clock. The bell of the church tolled it. I had to go, must put on the mask again, and like all other men in the world, try and act once more like a man. She didn't cling to me when I left—I clung to her—then hurried away.

As we marched down to the station I saw her standing motionless beside the car—looking for me. She waved when she saw me, and the fellow next me asked—

"Who's your lady friend, Thor?"

I shoved the butt of my rifle in his stomach.

She was still standing by the car when the train pulled out.

CHAPTER XII

FAREWELL TO YOUTH

WHEN we were embarking on the boat that night, the O. C, who was now just captain again, motioned me out of the line. I fell out, and he said—

"Listen, Thor; you grab one of these bags of mine and follow me."

I took the bag, put it on my shoulder and gladly followed him, as I saw his game. He had a cabin, and wanted me to have a little easier trip than I would have had if I stayed with the others on the jammed deck, which inevitably would be covered with moaning *mal de mer* cases before we reached the other side.

We pushed and jostled our way through, the captain with his tubby figure easily clearing the way for me to follow. He ultimately found his cabin, and to my surprise it was already occupied by two other officers. I had forgotten that they would be crammed in just as we were. Like all Englishmen, they watched with fishy eyes and dumb amazement the phenomenon of a captain making an N. C. O. at home.

"Sorry, boys," the captain said, "to pack you a bit tight, but this chap is really an old friend of mine. I hope you don't mind associating with a gentleman for a change."

They grinned, and the ice was broken. One, a fair haired chap with the Flying Corps badge on, said:

"That's jolly well right, Canada. The question is, will he associate with us? If he will, tell him to forget all about officers."

My old O. C. friend's eyes twinkled as he replied—

"Don't worry, Limey, he will."

We settled ourselves as conveniently as possible, and I glanced at the other Limey, as the captain called them, and saw that he was a tall hawk nosed chap, with a thin frame and features that were almost gaunt. He wore a monocle, and was really the first Englishman I had seen in whose general ensemble a monocle really fitted. He had, relevantly or not, a large mouth and gray eyes, I noticed.

We duly killed a bottle, and then suddenly grew conscious of artillery fire and the heavy thud of shells and bombs. The ship stopped and I looked questioningly at the R. E.

"Don't bother about that, Canada. Jerry's trying to lay eggs on Boulogne, and the Archies are receiving him with open arms. We'll have to wait till it's over, that's all," he reassured me.

I sighed with relief, and noticed that the Flying Corps fellow looked brighter too. It was just like waiting to cross the street during heavy traffic.

It was July when we once more reached the battalion. There had been several more disastrous trips in the line since we left, and many new faces where old faces used to be.

Daddy welcomed us as usual, but this

time we saw a change in him. Gray hairs were prominent and lines of worry were appearing in his face. As soon as he saw me he congratulated me on my silver gray hairs that were now plain to be seen. He told me cheerfully that I looked as old as he did, if not older, and said—

"Have you had rheumatism yet?"

I had to plead guilty.

"That's a certain sign of dotage then. We old men are about done, Thor."

When I walked back to my billet I brought out my steel mirror and I had to admit that I looked old. Was I actually aged? I likened myself to an engine that had been set at a certain speed, and just built strong enough for that. Naturally it would wear out very quickly when run above that speed. I was no longer nineteen but forty, and it would be more merciful for me to die than to break suddenly. I knew I could hold myself under control for awhile, but the brakes were getting warm. Some day there would be a crash. I began to be afraid of shell shock. I knew my nerves were going, and I would catch myself tearing paper, chewing my nails, and fancied I saw other signs of an impending break. I wished that death would beat the nervous breakdown to the tape. I hated the idea of going out as a shock case.

Later orders came that I was promoted to sergeant, and second in command of my old platoon in D Company. There was no officer, as the last one had been killed a few days before, with the other sergeant, so I was in charge of the platoon when we went into the line at the beginning of August.

Owing to unforeseen circumstances the trip had to be doubled in time, as there was no one to relieve us. I was ten days with about two hours sleep a day, and with the responsibility of looking after the lives of thirty to forty men. On the second night Fritz found us with whizz bangs, killed four, and wounded sixteen, and on the fourth night we had to act as covering support for some working parties who were digging a trench in No Man's Land, and he found us again and killed two more and wounded five.

No matter how recklessly I exposed myself, I could not get hit. The joke seemed to be on me.

On the seventh day my head and arms began to shake, so that I could not stop them. I couldn't even lift a drink of rum to my mouth. Luckily I was alone when it happened.

We were relieved on the night of August 18th in a pouring rain, and several of our men were too tired to walk over the ridge. I stayed with them in the village of Petit Vimy overnight, and stood guard while they slept.

THE JOKE was still on me. We climbed the ridge in daylight in full view of enemy observation balloons, but no shell came over. The next day we were rushed by motor bus to Le Brebis to relieve the 2nd Division, who had fought the Battle of Hill 70, which was still raging. The 1st Division had captured the Hill, but there had been so many counter attacks that they had to be relieved by the 2nd, who were in turn relieved by the 3rd. The 4th was holding our old frontage at Vimy, three divisional fronts. After doing a double trip, we were back in line again with hardly any rest.

The strength of the battalion had never been lower, and there were no fresh men in sight. Those were dark days for Canada. Every one admitted that the war could not be stopped. It was too big for one man or group of men to halt. We went to try to hold, at the price of several hundred men, a few yards of chalk called Hill 70. The feeling had come at last for which I was hoping. That feeling of death made me calm again, and my nerves were steady. I looked forward with interest to death, and made a bet with myself that something specially cruel was being saved for me.

Tubby was now captain of the company to which I belonged, and we had hardly got outside of the town of Le Brebis on our way to Loos, when he dropped back. I couldn't see his face in

the dusk, but patently he was worried. The men were not grousing as usual, and when Canadians don't grouse something is wrong.

Tubby spoke up.

"By the Lord, Sergeant, I don't like this; they are too quiet. Poor beggars, twenty days now without a decent sleep, and now this! And by the sound of it, it is going to be hell. Can you sing?"

"I? Sing?" I stuttered it again. "S-ing? What the hell for?"

"We have to make those guys forget their troubles, by hook or crook," he replied, and suddenly he began himself to sing.

He had an awful voice, like the bellow of a bull in pain. I grinned and slowly, very slowly, I heard the men in front of me begin to chuckle, one by one.

But it caught and from line to line it went, was picked up, and carried on, till soon the whole battalion was singing.

Goodbyeee . . . Goodbyeeeee.
Wipe the tear, Baby dear, from your eyeee.
For it's hard to part, I know,
But IIIII'll be tickled to death to go
Don't sigheee, don't cryeee.
There's a silver lining in the skyeee.
By-by, old thing,
Cheerio, chin-chin.
Napoo, Toodle-oo. Goodbyeee.

The adjutant came running back to see who the hell was making the noise. The men roared with laughter, and sang louder than ever. Catcalls were heard here and there; they began to yell at the gun limbers passing, and every one started to grouse again right merrily. I saw Tubby in the light of a flare wiping his face.

Thank God, the men were back to normal. *Tramp-tramp-tramp.* The feet were swinging now, not dragging.

Somebody broke out:

"Say, I saw a couple of Yankees today. Officers going up to Loos."

Another voice replied:

"Yanks? What the hell are they doing in France? They might get hurt."

Everybody laughed.

"You blockhead," No. 1 replied, "don't you know the Yanks are in the war?" No. 2, evidently a humorist, said:

"What, have we got to fight the Yanks too?"

No. I grew sarcastic.

"You damn' fool, they are on our side."

The same voice answered—

"So are the Irish."

Another voice broke in now:

"I'll bet a dollar to a doughnut that after this war is over, the Yanks will start an argument as to who won it, and they will have to appeal to the Germans for judgment, and Jerry will say to the Frenchmen, "You did it," and to the British, "You did," till at last they will have to have another war to settle it.

"Well, who *will* be able to say they won it?" another voice inquired.

The humorist answered—

"The Portuguese!" The discussion ended amid bursts of laughter.

PLOD-PLOD-PLOD. The boredom of war was upon us. We were in Loos now, and the soil was different from that in any place where I had been before. It was chalky and hard. No sticking in the mud here, I thought. We were out of town now, and every one became silent again, just plod, plod, plod. Shells began to arrive, and men fell here and there, wounded.

At Hill 70—a hill that overlooked the city of Lens, a hill that the Germans had to have if they were to hold the city—the supporting front line trench would be lined with machine guns so that if the small groups had to fall back to their real front, there was a warm reception waiting for the Germans.

It was a moonlight night, we were in single file now, and Fritz had concentrated all his fire immediately on the hill and behind it, so that no shells were falling in our vicinity.

We were in the C. T. (communication trench) at last, and I waited at the side until my platoon filed by. Twenty-four men I counted. There was only one man who was dragging very badly, leaving a

gap that might be disastrous. I knew him. He was nervous, poor devil, so I called him out and when he came alongside of me I began talking to him gently. He came closer—time was short—and I pressed the end of my rifle as heavily as possible on his foot. I felt the bone give; he wilted and fell with a groan. I called the stretcher bearer and told him to look after him and keep his mouth shut, then joined the end of my platoon.

Well, that was one good turn. The poor devil was game enough, but just nervous, and it was better to save him the agony ahead and let him get out now while he could.

The trenches were in good shape, I noticed, and chalky, too. The British must have been working at them before we relieved them to take the hill, I thought. A devil's own job, working in that stuff. The trench grew deeper, the shell fire closer, the pace quicker. "Wire overhead" sounded more frequently, and I began to get ready for action.

"Keep closed up there ahead. Don't lose touch. Close up, close up!"

We were in it now; smoke kept drifting in, the trench was broken here and there, and dead were lying in the bottom. The usual roar and whizz of bursting shells deafened us.

"Close up, close up! Keep touch, keep moving."

Shuffle, stumble.

"Keep up, don't lose touch! Close up. Shell hole to the right. Keep up. Who is that?"

A figure was sitting in the side of the trench. He wasn't one of my platoon anyway.

"Keep up. Close up. Keep touch. Keep touch!"

The men were cursing blindly but kept moving, on and on. I don't know how long it lasted, but we were out of the trench now, over on our old front line, I surmised, going overland, with shrapnel breaking around.

I had two really good men as corporals, so I decided to take the patrol myself, and leave them in charge. I would be moving all the time, and at least that was better than sitting idle.

We quickly established ourselves, and brigade machine guns also moved in. So we were ready, in army parlance, to "establish touch with the enemy."

IT WAS nearly dawn when we started out. Judging by the Fritzie flares we were about eight hundred yards from his lines. My section was barely out of our own wire when figures loomed up and a voice shouted—

"Who's that?"

"Gosh," I thought, "I have forgotten the password. What shall I do?"

My hair stood on end, and I was expecting a hand grenade any second when a member of my own section answered truculently—

"Who the hell wants to know?"

I grinned. If they were Canadians they wouldn't bother about passwords after that.

So we started out again, and were challenged three times by different patrols. No Man's Land was simply crawling with Canadians. We gave the inevitable answer, "Who the hell wants to know?" and it worked. Our limit of safety was about two hundred yards from the German front line, as our own machine guns and artillery would be firing in that area. So we proceeded cautiously.

We were now on our own about three hundred yards from our lines. We strung out in shell holes and waited, and as we were unable to smoke, there was nothing to do but just keep peering in all directions.

It came at last—a German flare thrown up showed me some queer figures about twenty yards in front, but I wasn't sure, so kept peering. The sudden darkness after the flare had died down blinded my eyes. I spoke to the man beside me—

"Did you see anything?"

He replied that he wasn't sure he had, so we waited, bombs ready in our hands, and figures loomed out of the darkness.

A man from another hole challenged—"Who is that?"

A voice answered, "Canadians;" but *they kept coming*, and *none of our men would have.* I pulled the pin, shouted "now" and let her go.

It was just like throwing snowballs when we were kids. Pull the pin and let her go—crash—crash—crash. *Bang—bang—boom*—flash—smoke. Bombs began to come back. but they were wild. A flare went up and showed a big German patrol right in the open—crash—crash—crash.

"Now, fellows—ahead? Down the—come on!"

A wild rush ahead. We had been told to get prisoners if we could. I fired my rifle as I ran, then another flare went up. Neither front line dared fire because of their own men. At last—my rifle held by the barrel and swinging like a flail met something. Grunts, groans, curses, squeals, thuds.

"*Kamarad, Kamarad*—mercy, *Kamarad*, mercy."

It was over. We counted them up. Five prisoners, new boys.

"Beat it, before the damned machine guns find us."

A breathless staggering run toward our lines—then I saw the light of red flares thrown up—Germans.

Too late. They had caught us! Crash, crash—crash—smoke—glare of blinding lights. Our own wire now; I fell over it. A blinding flash of light, a searing flame of a thousand hells . . .

MY FIRST waking impression was of stabbing, burning pain, pain that throbbed at regular intervals through my left leg. My left eye seemed to be covered with plaster of Paris, for I could feel nothing except that, and I had absolutely no action from it at all. My face also, on the left side, felt queer, and began to tingle with an indescribable agony. My right eye seemed all right, though I was afraid to try to open it, and I smelled abominably of chloroform.

My next impression, after my numbed faculties began to wake, was of surprise. I thanked God I was alive after all—alive. Good God, alive! I shouldn't be alive, I should be dead—how the hell had this happened? Had God relented after all? The idea of it filled me with joy. God had changed his mind, had seen that he couldn't beat me. By Jove, I will see Luella after all, after all. I can marry her—have kids. Won't it be glorious! By Jove, isn't it wonderful? Damn that pain—ooooooh!

I groaned in spite of myself. Then I heard some one speak to me:

"If you are awake now, will you lift your right eyelid? You can't; it is quite all right. Try."

I opened it very, very gently, but the light was too much, and my head began to throb. Again a voice began to speak:

"I am afraid you will have to try and stand that pain. Will you try again?"

I felt a hand, fingers, on my eyelid, which opened gently—and again the burning pain. It was in my other eye. My head throbbed. I saw a kindly face bending over me, its eyes filled with anxiety.

"Now will you try to open your mouth? Do it very slowly."

I closed my eyes and concentrated on opening my mouth. It opened slowly, the lips seeming not to want to part, but they did at last, giving like stretched elastic.

"Well, well, that's not bad, not bad at all. You can close it again." I obeyed.

So the days passed. The doctor, milk, pills, sleep.

At last I was ready to be moved, and was taken to England, with the pain in my leg gone now, and pains in my eye only at intervals. It was my third morning in England that I noticed it first, and the conviction slowly grew that the pain I had thought I had in my leg was a joke—I didn't have a leg! Next day, I pumped the nurse. I said—

"Say, nurse, I guess I will have to have a glass eye, won't I?"

She thought I knew, and nodded her head.

No other thought filled my mind but that of self-pity. For days I brooded, and once I even lowered my pride to pray for death, as a mercy.

But there were distractions. While the bandages were on I looked quite romantic, and many visitors would stop and talk in the two-bed ward which I shared with an Australian. He was a splendid looking chap, and a fellow whom one easily liked. He had lost both hands at the wrists and I pitied him as he pitied me.

My bandages were removed next day, and then came the shock. As I said before, they had made me look romantic. But when I shaved that morning, I began to comprehend dimly the joke. God, I was hideous! The left side of my face was a large livid scar, with a hole about an inch across, and a quarter of an inch deep in the cheek. With the black patch over my eye covering the empty socket, I looked fiendish, hellish, the spawn of Satan. The muscles had been hurt or disarranged, for I had no control over them at all.

I fell on the bed and lay there. I think I wept. After hours of moody contemplation, which the Aussie did his best to break, it dawned upon me, in wondering what Luella would make of this, that I had not communicated with her. The question was, should I? Wasn't it best just to drop her altogether? I couldn't marry her, so why bother her?

But in spite of this logic, I decided to write. I wanted to test her. I wanted to see what she would do. So I wrote, telling her that I wanted to see her.

That afternoon two girls came to the door of our ward laughing, joking. Then they saw me, and there was silence: horror, repugnance. They did not come in.

Luella came next day. She looked splendid, poised there like a bird, her eyes darting around, looking for me. My heart pumped. I lay on my left side with my face buried in the pillow. I called to her cheerfully:

"Well, Luella, here I am, like a bad penny."

She saw which was I, and came over with a smothered cry, knelt beside the bed. It was our hands which met. She cooed over me as though I were her child who had hurt himself.

"Oh, Lionel, my love, my love. Oh, Lionel." I felt that her exclamations were absurd, and wanted to push her away, but in spite of myself the tears came into my own eye. "Oh, Lionel, my love, my heart. Oh, darling, darling, how I love you—my coward, my poor, brave, foolish little coward!"

It was hard. I pushed her back and seemed to be pushing my own heart away. Pushed her back, and managed to say:

"Sit down. I want to talk to you."

She fell back in hurt amazement at my tone.

"Why, what's the matter, Lionel?"

She started to approach me, but I moved her back, an imperative, weak gesture.

"Listen, Luella. I have lost a leg. I have lost an eye too. You haven't seen my face. You wouldn't marry me, only out of pity. See!"

I raised myself up before she could interpose any more assurances.

"See what you would have—"

She seemed to wither up. The true state of things had been borne in upon her at last. She moaned and fell beside the bed. She shook with weeping, but I was game, and would not give in. My hand stretched out toward her, but it did not touch her. Poor little girl, it was a coward's trick to strike her through me.

The nurse came in and took Luella away. I waited—the nurse came back, alone.

CHAPTER XIII

RECONSTRUCTION

I LAY, a somber, sullen, snarling beast, for days after that, and though the nurse and doctors tried hard to cheer me up, it was of no avail. The days passed, and in despair the doctors booked me for an immediate transfer to Canada.

They did their best to warn people not to show abhorrence when they saw me hobbling around the hospital, but I was too much for human nature, or so it seemed to my morbidly introspective mood.

In December, 1917, I started for Canada, and in spite of myself hopes began to arise, hopes that were encouraged even more on the boat, as there were several who were really worse than myself in some respects, though none so badly disfigured.

And the doctor encouraged me even more by telling me that there were surgeons in Toronto who could fix my face so that it would be barely noticeable.

We arrived in Halifax on December 18th, after an uneventful trip. I was looking forward to home—to Dad—to Mother. I understood them both better now, I thought. I saw the end of the road. The trip to Toronto was a triumph. At every station there were crowds, cheers, bands playing, gifts. The nurse in the car was a born mother to mankind; she disregarded my face and nursed and petted me. I talked of home, and one day she said—

"How did you ever get overseas, a man of your age?"

I looked at her bewildered.

"A man of my age," I repeated. "How old do you take me to be?"

"Oh," she said, "you are easily forty-five."

I paused, thunderstruck, and at last managed to gasp:

"Forty-five, forty-five! Do you mean it?"

She nodded her head.

"Why, are you older than that?"

I hunted for my steel mirror. Forty-five, forty-five! Good God, she is off her head. Then I looked at that hideous face in amazement, and had to admit it. My hair was quite gray now, and under my right eye were heavy wrinkles, and of course the wound distorted my face out of all reason. But—but—I forgot about the nurse, who left, and stared at my face stupidly. Forty-five.

I shall never forget the night we arrived at North Toronto Station

The nurse bustled through the car.

"Sergeant Thor, you had better remain in your seat; your relatives will find you easier that way, and probably can have you carried out." I agreed.

The others filed out slowly, and as each one left the coach, a roar of cheers greeted him. The band played "The Maple Leaf Forever" and "O Canada." It was wonderful. I waited eagerly for Dad. There he was, towering over the others, looking for me—for me. He made his way forward and I lost sight of him, but I knew what he was doing. He probably had entered the train farther up, and was even now pushing his way through the cars, hunting for me. "O Canada, O Canada!" Home! Mother! Dad!

At last he came—he entered the doorway, walked down the aisle, glanced at me and passed me by . . .

He didn't know me! I could have wept, or laughed. Ha-ha, the joke's on you!

"Dad, Dad! Here I am. It's me, Lionel!"

Dad came back, stared at me, then—

"God in heaven, my son!"

I wept again, and he fell beside me, picked me up in his strong arms, crooned over me while tears from his eyes fell on my face. Through the doorway, out on the platform, then that crowd of gaping fools saw him. A thunderous roar of cheers—the band. "See the Conquering Hero Comes." And Dad marched straight through that crowd, cursing it.

In the car he held me in his arms still and crooned to me. After a little while he spoke:

"Mother is waiting at home, son—with your favorite kind of pie and everything. Don't worry now. Don't worry—you're home."

Mother was on the porch waiting, with the light on, and a banner strung across with "WELCOME HOME." Mrs. Braithwaite was there too, and many others, but Mother stood alone at the top

of the stairs waiting. And once more I was going up that long path. The end of the road this time, true enough.

Dad marched on, up the path, up the steps. A glad cry from Mother—

"Oh, my Boy!"

Dad said nothing, but looked at her with eyes that said—

"Woman, behold your handiwork."

A scream that wrung my heart and made me rise out of Dad's arms to tell her not to worry. Then she saw that hideous, horrible thing that was her son—saw that it was no one else—gave another cry, the cry of a damned soul, and fell.

I WAKENED in a strange room, dimly lighted, in a bed that was most comfortable, and as my one eye blinked open my first thought was of Dad, poor Dad: just more grief, more trouble for him. I rolled over and went to sleep . . . again I wakened to feel a hand on my head, a soft gentle hand that was cool to my head. I was afraid to open my eye for fear the hand would move, but at last curiosity compelled me.

I smelt a most delightful perfume, and moved my head, and I couldn't see the face. At last, however, I stretched my neck back, and saw a chin, a woman's chin. I smiled and moved my head. With that movement there came a startled gasp, and the chin came downward and a face came before my line of vision. A face not exactly beautiful, but piquant, with a beautiful skin, small tilted nose, nice mouth and bright brown eyes—wonderful eyes. I smiled, she smiled, and we watched each other for the fraction of a moment. Then she realized her position, and moved.

"I'm so sorry, so sorry, but I must have gone to sleep. Just a moment."

She disappeared, coming back in a moment with medicine which she gave me. Then she sat on a chair surveying me with those eyes, which, while they did not antagonize me, made me feel a resentment at being regarded as helpless. Yet I liked being helpless just then. The quizzical living eyes of a real woman. She spoke again—

"I suppose it is permissible to call you Sobersides?"

I started. Where had she found that name? The question must have shown in my eyes, for she said—

"I am Allen's wife."

Allen's wife! I began to ejaculate questions.

"Where the—I mean, where did you come from? And where am I?"

"All in good time, Sobersides. But now you must sleep some more."

I suppose my look must have been pleading, for she came over and put her hand once more on my head and sat beside me—and once more I slept.

So the days passed, sleeping, eating. I wasn't in my home but in hers. Again life began to come back to me . . . I wanted to sit up, and one day she allowed me.

Dad came and had a long talk with me. He told me that I had been given leave indefinitely on account of the illness. The loss of blood through my wounds had made me very weak, and this was not helped by my spiritual condition. Mother had died from shock and heart failure during my relapse, and had been buried without my knowing. Dad looked careworn. Poor old Dad, he had tried his best for all of us, and I was the net result.

At last I said to him—

"Listen, Dad, wasn't it Mrs. Braithwaite I saw on the veranda?"

He nodded.

"But how did I get here, Dad?"

He smiled, the first smile I had seen from him for a long time.

"She came to the house one day just before you arrived, and inquired about you, said her husband had constantly talked of you. I am proud of you, Lionel. I met your other friend, the V. C, when the city welcomed him, and he said you were the finest, whitest chap he had seen." (I blushed.) "She wanted to know if you were the same man, and when she found out that you were, she said she would like to meet you when you

came home. She brought you in an ambulance, and has nursed you ever since. In fact she has taken absolute charge of you and not let anybody see you except myself." He was silent a minute or two, then said, "You must have had a very trying time overseas, son?"

I grinned—I couldn't help it—and said:

"You cover it perfectly, Dad. It was very trying. In fact almost painful at times!" We both laughed.

The door opened and my nurse peeked in.

"Time's up, Mr. Thor, I'm afraid," she said with a smile. Dad left, and I was glad to go off to sleep again.

I asked her one day when she was going to allow me to get up and have other visitors, but she only smiled and said—

"You can get up tomorrow, for good, but as for visitors, not yet!"

That made me mad, and I pouted like a spoiled child.

She surprised me, to say the least.

"You can have visitors, or leave this house, the day you stop pitying yourself, so put that in your pipe and smoke it. You have brooded too much, and I am going to cure it. On second thought, you can get up this afternoon and come downstairs and make yourself useful. You have been lazy long enough!"

I stared at her grimly.

"I'll get up, but damned if I am going to do everything you tell me!"

She laughed indulgently, and said:

"We shall see. Get up." And I got up . . .

Reconstruction had begun.

GREAT portions of every day were passed in reading. Allen's collection, philosophical and creative works rubbing shoulders haphazardly, suited my mood, and I found myself building new reason and faith in spite of my bitterness. A new house for myself. After all it was a wonderful world in which so much had been done and thought.

Not only that, but in this calm and secure harbor, cut off from the storms of the world and the flesh, I could see Allen's arguments in clearer perspective, for after all, instead of being so ready to curse God, I had a lot to thank Him for. Allen had said that these things were man-made, the war, the birth of myself and all the forces that pushed me against my will into the turmoil, man-made, every one of them, except, as I began to see more clearly, the friends I had gained; for at every period in my life there had been a friend at my side to help me through my troubles—Mrs. Braithwaite, Hartley, Dad, Allen, my wife, Luella, even a German who had given me a drink in No Man's Land.

As the days ran on, I fell in love with Allen's kiddies. My disfigurement did not bother them for a minute, and we grew to be great friends. The eldest was a curly headed boy, the image of his daddy. One afternoon as I drowsed in the den, he came in alone and stood looking at me very solemnly.

"Mummy's cryin'."

I felt embarrassed, but also curious.

"And why is she crying, son?"

"Oh, just about you and Daddy," was his startling answer. "She cries nearly every night. Boys don't cry, do they?"

"No, son, boys and men shouldn't cry; just girls and women."

"But I don't like to see Mummy cry. I wish you could stop her. Daddy always could when he was here."

There was silence for a few moments, than I asked—

"Where is your Mummy?"

"Come on," he said.

I took my crutches and he led me into another room, where she lay on a bed, her frame shaking. It was my turn now. I comforted her, and found a sweet relief in thinking of the sorrows of another.

One evening shortly after I had found her crying, I asked her why she had cried about me.

For a minute she said nothing, then:

"Men are such queer creatures. I never believed the story of Don Quixote until I

married. Then I found men were just like that. I supposed, when Allen wrote about you, that you must be one of those men with a handsome appearance and a tremendously forceful personality, a man outstanding among men. You had to be, I thought, or Allen would never have liked you. After Allen's death, or possibly before, I too began to admire you from afar off like a schoolgirl. When I heard of your coming home, I could not resist it; I must see this man whom my husband admired. I had to beg your Mother to let me wait and see you. Then, you came, broken, sobbing—and I took you home, gave you my bed, nursed you, and thought as I had never thought before.

"Then I began to see, as I listened to your delirium, that if we would only see, every man is the prince of our dreams, if we could see. I saw your outward form broken, but when I heard you cursing, daring God to do his worst, I saw you as you were—and could understand why Allen loved you . . . I can understand any man far better."

I looked long at the fire, almost asleep, for her voice had soothed me, and when she stopped I waited a minute for her to continue. But as she did not I spoke of what was in my mind.

"I too have made my discoveries of men since I went overseas. I found good men, bad men, cowards, saints, heroes, villains. I have traveled a long way on the road, and even now I can't see the end. Shall I tell you about my discoveries?"

She nodded, and I continued:

"You may talk of heroes and think of men who have earned and received medals of fabled beings who possess no fear, but I know what fear is. It has been with me a long, long time. See! It has turned my hair gray. I know fear, and I know men who possessed no fear, and every last one of them were bull headed morons, ignorant, without brains to imagine either fear or bravery. Heroism is not an impulse, it isn't ignorance. I knew a man (not Allen) who was in my section when I was wounded, and fear possessed him. He was sick with it, his teeth chattered, his legs almost gave way under him, but he kept on, kept on. He had been one of these furtive poolroom rats, a sort of gutter-snipe in civil life, you see. But he kept on.

"Well, that was sheer, stark heroism. I knew a saint; she was a harlot, who gave me what little self-respect I have. I knew a virtuous man, who kept sober, never smoked, and never broke any commandment, and yet I hated and despised him and the lowness of his aspirations. I found myself loving blasphemers and rogues, heart breakers, woman breakers, and hating thin lipped ladies as unnatural.

"I have found everything—except God, and even now I begin to see the end of my quest for Him. I found a girl who loved me in one way, and I married her—and she died. She loved me as a mother loves her child. I had another who loved me, loved me for my body, physical passion, and it too was beautiful, but when that attraction was gone, the love wilted and died. Each love was true and perfect in its own perspective, and as for your love for me— I am old, old beyond my years. Don't be offended. Your love is not for me at all, it is your loyalty to a man that makes your love for me."

The fire flickered and almost died. She added two more logs, and we waited in silence, watching the flames burn up once more. I looked at the face of my nurse; her dark eyes seemed sad, and clear, and they turned to me unashamed; and they said, before I heard her lulling voice—

"Does it matter?"

And I was content for that night.

THE END

The Small Voice

A Story of the Steel Mills

By EDMUND M. LITTELL

IT WAS a fine night for a murder. Goss, whose hate filled mind had planned out every smallest detail of it, was so thoroughly satisfied with the vitally essential weather conditions that he had difficulty in maintaining his habitual manner of slow deliberation, so impatient was he to get Fredericks to the appointed spot while everything was right. He had waited, curbing the impulse to kill that arose in him each time he laid eyes on his fellow worker, through thirteen unsatisfactory nights before this; the fourteenth had arranged itself. Now it was come. Fredericks, mouthing the petulant, querulous mood which he could assume so well for purposes of his own, actually expressed the very words.

The darkness fairly smothered. It dropped down from a gloom of clouds that hung low above the roofs of Argo Steel, bearing the soot laden threat of a heavy summer downpour. It muffled the sounds of steel making that rumbled and whined in processes that knew no midnight lunch hour. It even dimmed the outdoor lights that glowed above various working areas about the great reservation. And the path they walked, between the towering, light damming walls of two great bar mill buildings, was blackness itself. It was no place for eyes, this half-mile cañon; it was a test for sureness of feet—and an excellent excuse for Fredericks to build up the calculated mood with which Goss was so familiar.

Goss was walking easily, for his feet knew every inch of the square-mile reservation. Fredericks was making the most of his troubles in the Stygian darkness behind. He was scuffling awkwardly through the loose cinders on one side, then the other, of the well trodden path,

whining wordless sounds the while, a disembodied spirit of shrewd peevishness—until he stubbed his toe sharply and all but fell, to judge by the sounds Goss heard. Then he cursed—

"Damn this dark!" And Goss knew satisfaction.

That was not play-acting; that was honest, discomfited anger. Torment—if only Fredericks could be sent out by such a means. Such was his thought, but what he tossed back over his shoulder was level voiced advice.

"Lift your feet," Goss said. "Keep close behind me."

"Keep close behind you?" Fredericks snorted. "So dark you can't see your hand in front of your face, and he asks me to keep behind him. You would pick a night like this for a walk, wouldn't you? Inspection, on a night like this!" And then he added the words which for an hour had been ringing in Goss's mind. "It's a fine night for a murder, and that's all it is!"

Goss was not a laughing man. The business of making steel, and his unswerving determination to advance himself in it, was much too serious a matter. But that remark was enough to arouse in him an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh out, loud and long. For Fredericks was not suspicious; that Goss knew. He was only being fretful. He was much too busy playing his own game to suspect that there might be another, more deadly, one.

He had struck the peevish note the moment Goss had met him, apparently quite by chance and in a corner of the yard where there were neither lights nor observers, and he was carrying on with it. He was whining a mood, not a suspicion, and supremely confident he was that he could work his own game a third time. Goss was so sure of this that, while he restrained the laugh that rose within him, he could not refrain from expressing something of his thoughts.

"Yes," he observed, and there was no little satisfaction in his tone, "it is a fine night for a murder, isn't it?"

And Fredericks ignored it, as Goss had expected him to. What an added satisfaction, practically to tell the man that his death was ahead of him, to hear him yammer along, regardless of the threat that lay in those words. For talk was Fredericks' game, and he persisted.

"Dragging me back here on a wild goose chase," he yapped from the darkness behind. "Taking me away from a good, hot supper. Don't know why I came along, anyhow."

That was a lie, and Goss knew it. Otherwise this carefully scheduled plan of his would have failed. Fox faced Fredericks was a thief; a treacherous, unscrupulous sneak. Twice since his coming to Argo Steel had he stolen from Goss. Twice? No, three times—the snake! Now he thought he was going to steal again. As though the first two thefts had not been enough, to say nothing of the third one.

They had not been thefts of gold, none of them. They had been of something far more precious than that. The first two had been thefts of ideas, schemes for the improvement of mill operations, painfully conceived plans which are the stepping stones to promotion. Goss never quarreled with men who won advancement fairly. He had seen many a man more brilliant than he climb past him while he plodded slowly upward in the operating department. But Fredericks—

HE HAD come into Argo Steel by way of the mechanical department, had to work hand in glove with Goss, and forthwith set out to win the coveted job upon which Goss had had his eyes fixed for years. Twice since then had he burglarized. Twice had he broken and entered by means of that cold chisel of a tongue of his. And twice had Goss lost something more precious than gold.

Each time Fredericks had assumed the air of the supercilious critic, attacking the plan which Goss, by the very nature of his job, was compelled to discuss with him. Each time he had maintained a high and mighty skepticism that aroused in Goss

a warm—and completely revelatory—defense of the idea he had so painfully thought out. Each time he had taken his treacherously won loot and hastened with it to the main office on the hill, reporting the plan as his own. Now he was trying the same trick, being noisier than ever before. Was it because, with that third theft in mind, he was more cocksure than ever? Or was it because Goss, entrenched by his own purpose and luring him to his death with another offered plan, was refusing to warm up in defensive argument?

"Think I came here to be a yard hopping night hawk?" he was snapping peevishly. "You've got another guess coming. Damned if I'll ever put myself out like this again, not even for the Old Man. Ugh!" as he tripped again. "Can't even keep the yard clean, can you? Talking about moving the scrap yard—what for, I'd like to know? It's scattered all over the place now. First thing I do when I get that assistant super's job, I'll put a gang on this plant and clean it up, that's what I'll do . . . Hey, where are you?"

"Right here."

"Well, make a noise like it, then. Walking along like a ghost—how do you expect me to follow you? I'll string some lights around here, too. Not that I expect to be using them. I'll be sitting up in the main office with a daylight job. No more of this double turn stuff for me. No more of this working nights every other two weeks. Then you'll have to come up on the hill with these half baked ideas of yours. Like this scrap yard thing. Harebrained, I call it. Nothing to it . . . What's the matter?"

Goss had stopped so abruptly that Fredericks collided with him. He was standing motionless there, wearing a grim smile, indifferent as to whether or not the other could see it. How easy it would be to wipe Fredericks out right now. But this was not the appointed place. This was too inconvenient. Instead—

"Nothing's the matter," he said slowly. "Only you're not assistant superintendent yet, and if you don't want to see what I've got to show you—" He began to retrace his steps.

"Who said I didn't want to?" Fredericks demanded quickly; and Goss savored an enormous cat-and-mouse satisfaction. "What's the use of going back now?" Goss knew that there was no use, that Fredericks could not have been dragged away from the opportunity he saw ahead of him.

"None," he said. "But you don't seem to be very crazy to—"

"Who said I wasn't? Come on, let's get this over with. I'm not crazy to take this walk again."

Goss swung around.

"You won't have to," he promised, thinking of the third theft. The first two had been treachery, but the third—"Take hold of my coat tail," he said in a voice that shook a little. "We'll get there sooner."

That third theft! Having duped Goss twice, Fredericks had given every indication that he did not intend to stop there; he would continue on up the ladder to success, using for rungs the ideas worked out by the other man.

"What's the big idea—a race?" whined Fredericks from behind; and Goss took a mighty grip upon himself and slowed down. "Think this idea of yours won't keep? The thing that gets me is, why didn't you wait till daylight, anyhow? Don't you know we're on double turn today? You might have kept this till morning—or is your idea so full of holes you want to cover it up with this dark?"

No answer from Goss. His mood was no longer playful. His voice would have betrayed him. But Fredericks needed none. He was still busy at his own game. Not quite so petulantly now; still he was being careful to maintain the air which had won for him before.

"Trouble with you fellows that stick around one mill all your lives is that you go off half cocked. You probably got this idea tonight, and you're so crazy about it that you can't wait till daylight to talk about it. If you'd knocked around like I have, you'd know better. Me, I've

worked in some of the biggest mills in the country. I *know*."

Goss tried his voice.

"So you've said." It was dead level once more.

"That last idea of yours, for instance. It never would have worked, the way you had it. It took me to tell you where it was wrong, see? You never would have got your coke cooled right if I hadn't figured out a better way. That's why the operating committee ate it up when I passed it on to them. Same with the ore handling stunt. Both of them were raw when you told me about them, and perfect when I polished them off. You've got to know to get by these days."

"Yes."

"That producer gas plant now. There's the idea that got me this job. I knew it would work, because I saw it tried out at Mammoth Steel. If I hadn't brought that with me, I'd probably be doing flunky work around the mechanical office right now. But I put it across. It's working, too. You saw me start it tonight. And it's going to get me that assistant super job, too."

"You don't have to hang on to me now."

THEY had left the cañon of darkness and come out upon a roadway that led to the right, past the ends of two buildings, toward a place that was dimly lighted—the scrap yard. They were still in darkness, yet the lights ahead served as guides, and Goss was free of a clinging hand.

"Then you and I can work together right," Fredericks was rambling on. "You with your operating experience, even if it is only practical, and me with my mechanical education. Only you'll have to cut out stunts like this scrap yard thing. Makes me think you aren't even a practical operator. Where's the scrap gang?"

They had drawn close enough to the dimly lighted area to make out its familiar details. On the left, enclosed by the skeleton framework of a long craneway, loomed the mountain of rusty, twisted scrap iron which had come from back yards, vacant lots and junk heaps to make fodder for the furnaces. Its top was lost in the upper darkness, the boneyard litter of its base was sprawling untidily in the light from shaded bulbs which hung on gooseneck brackets attached to the widely separated craneway columns. Beneath them and close to the heap, a train of high flatcars stood on narrow gage tracks, three long narrow boxes of cast iron lying crosswise on each car. Some of them were filled with scrap iron, some of their six-foot cavities were blackly empty. And the road beside it, walled here by the towering corrugated iron end of the last building but one in the long parade of buildings, was deserted. No heavy shouldered, rust covered men lounged about during this midnight lunch period. There was no sign of life apparent about the place.

"I sent them away," said Goss. "A hurry up job. Cleaning up."

"And that's another thing," Fredericks began in that whine of his. "You oughtn't to do that. There are ten open hearths yelling for scrap—" with a wave of his hand toward the point where the polished rails of the narrow gage disappeared into the darkness where the last building stood. "And there's more work here than any small gang can do, but you go and take them off the job. That's rotten operation, and you know it. That's—" He stopped. His small eyes had caught a flash from the deep set ones of Goss. "But that isn't my job, is it?"

"Not yet," said Goss.

He had backed up to lean against one of the laden charging boxes, and the hand that was invisible to Fredericks was dipping into it. He extracted a short length of rusty bar and slipped it into his pocket.

"Not yet," he repeated. Then this manner changed. "Now," he drawled, "if you want to start panning my scrap yard idea—"

"Panning?" Fredericks cried, and grinned into the craglike stolidity of

Goss's face. He was trying to be placating; Goss knew it. "You've got me wrong, Goss. I'm not panning. All I want is—"

"My idea, complete," Goss finished for him. "Well, here it is: Move the scrap yard on to a place behind the open hearth building. It will shorten the haul a good half-mile, it will cut—"

"Move all this?" Fredericks had lifted his voice to express his disparagement. It was his customary method. "Ten thousand tons of scrap iron? With no craneway down there?"

"I didn't say move the scrap; I said move the yard," Goss said coldly. It was an effort to do so, for despite his familiarity with Fredericks' method, he was feeling the same flush of warm defense that he had experienced twice before. But this time, "Load the stuff out to the furnaces as usual," he went on, almost chuckling. "Dump all incoming scrap in the new place. It won't take long to do that, not the way we use scrap. Come here a minute. I'll show you."

He walked on. He rounded the corner of the building and back into the pitch darkness. Only a few steps were necessary. And Fredericks followed him there, mouthing his skepticism.

"Why, I wouldn't think of suggesting such a plan to the operating committee. It would cost a fortune. You wouldn't save a cent. Besides, the skull cracker's in the way, you've got four standard gage tracks to move, and—"

"Take a look and see." Goss had stopped and faced about, and Fredericks halted too, facing toward the stretch of yard. "It's simple," said Goss behind him, and pulled out the short stout bar. "Just extend the craneway off there to the right—"

"With what?" Fredericks demanded. "Who'll O.K. an appropriation for that? It'll cost— Why, there isn't a man on the committee—"

Silence. Silence such as that which drops down when a pneumatic riveting hammer suddenly stops its chatter. Peace. Goss hurled the bar back toward the mountain of junk from which it had come, heard it strike the ground and clink against the pile. Serenity. He dusted the flakes of rust from his hand with soft, slow brushing of his palms. Silence.

Not an absolute silence, for the warm moist night was vibrant with the muffled sounds of industry. Lunch hours, rest periods, daylight, darkness—they mean nothing to the relentless demands of steel. Insatiable, steel. It goes on and on, singing its gigantic chorus while armies of men minister to its needs. There was the high whine of the distant bar mill motors, deepening to a grinding that told of a white hot billet being fed into the rolls; there was the *clang-clang!* of a crane's warning gong, the resonance of its humming gears as it rolled back and forth to serve the giant machines beneath; there was the bumbling rumble of the gargantuan blooming mill at the far end of the building beside which Goss stood—a heavy, vibrant sound that seemed to come through the air and through the ground simultaneously; and over and through it all came the cough of the blooming mill engine as its exhaust speeded, stopped, and speeded again in reverse, turning the ingot mangling rolls that took ten-ton bites of hot steel . . . That, to Goss, was silence.

Twenty minutes past twelve, the luminous hands of his watch told him. Less than fifteen minutes had passed since, in the obscurity of an unlighted spot on the other side of the plant, he had offered the lure of a new idea to an unscrupulous fox. In ten minutes more—

The waiting train of charging boxes had changed its appearance to an extent unobservable by the soon-to-return scrap gang. Of the black, unfilled cavities there was one less. Of the shaggy topped, filled ones that looked like boxes filled with brush there was one more. A very tiny change in a train of more than fifty boxes, one that heavy muscled men would never see. And all in less than thirty minutes, precisely as scheduled, and in complete solitude all the way.

Two years before, after a terrific, thirty-hour stretch of sleepless application, Goss had completed a job. A hot metal train had jumped the track and turned over, melting rails and blocking all communication between the blast furnaces and the open hearths, and he had supervised the re-establishment of the vital traffic without delaying production by so much as one second. It had been a job to be proud of, and he had been warmly congratulated by men. Now he felt the same way. Too bad that the sweet oil of other men's approval could not be received again. There were those who would have given it if they knew. But— He sighed contentedly as he shrugged his broad shoulders into his coat. There was gratification enough. His home secure, his job ahead, his life serene . . . He stiffened suddenly.

It was not fear that tightened him. There was nothing to be fearful about. He was straining his attention upon a pause in the sounds of industry. No man can spend most of his waking hours surrounded by such noises without coming to accept them as part of the air he breathes, especially when his responsibility lies in keeping them alive. Now the most dominant sound was gone. The cough of the blooming mill engine had paused over-long and failed to resume.

It was like the stopping of a clock in a silent room. It left a void in the chorus of production; a gap as ominous in significance as the shriek of a fire siren, and Goss concentrated every faculty there. Even his gaze pointed toward the place, as though he would send it through the darkness and the walls between and see what the trouble was. For that is what it might mean if the silence continued—trouble.

What was causing the silence? Was it a holdup in the delivery of ingots, a delay at the soaking pits where the ten-ton blocks were heated? If so, another sound would come—the sharp, staccato tooting of a shrill whistle that was the boss roller's way of yelling impatiently for service. None came. Then perhaps there was a broken roll, a— Another sound, a strange one, trickled into his searching ear, insinuating itself so subtly that he was not aware of when it had arrived; it was simply there.

It was shrill, yet soft. It was exceedingly faint, yet stabbingly penetrating in its unceasing persistence. It sounded like a prolonged exhalation through pursed lips, carried the meaning as of some one expressing amazement by an expelling of breath. It was the middle note of the ejaculation, *phew!* endlessly prolonged—*e-e-e-e-e-e-* . . .

A moment before Goss had wished silently for approbation. This was it. He could feel the breath of it cold upon his cheek. But if it came from puckered lips, where were they? His ears ached with listening, his head turned slowly, this way and that. There was no one to be seen. The sound did not come from close at hand.

Yet it did. It came from everywhere. He held his breath, waiting for it to descend to the lowest note of the ejaculation and stop, as any human expression was bound to do. But it did not. It held, up and up and up, never ending until his throat muscles ached with a sympathetic reaching. It seemed to grow more shrilly penetrating as it held there, a crescendo that built up over the whine of bar mill motors and the clang of crane gongs, yet it was no whit louder.

No; it was not human. The very steadiness of its monotone denied such a possibility. No creature of flesh and blood could sustain such a note for so long. It stabbed and gnawed, vibrating upon his inner ear like a drill; and his groping senses collected themselves, comprehension came.

It was mechanical. It was the blast of the producer gas plant, just put into operation that night. By Fredericks, who had pried his way into Argo Steel using it as a lever, and who was forever talking about it. Goss had heard it earlier in the evening, but had paid no attention to the peculiar sibilance of its blast because of his interest in the operation. It was one

more voice in the chorus of steel; that was all. After this he would recognize it. He drew a deep breath such as one takes after a long dive, and shivered. The motionless night air had stirred restlessly, bringing the smell of rain, and his recent exercise had warmed him. He buttoned his coat and hurried around the end of the building, for the blooming mill engine had not resumed its labor.

But he did not have to investigate. Before he had walked half the length of the building it took up its interrupted rhythm: *Cough-cough-cough!*—pause—*cough-cough-cough!*—pause. No breakdown, then. Only some temporary stoppage that could be inquired about when he had washed the rust from his hands and eaten a hot meal in the restaurant that crouched beneath a bank on the far side of the yard. And the high pitched shrilling was gone, overwhelmed by the noise of the blooming mill engine. The first large drops of rain arrived, spatting upon the rock of his face.

"SEEN Fredericks around?"

It was two o'clock in the morning, and Goss had just strolled down the incline from the elevated floor of the open hearth, where he had paused in his rounds long enough to watch the charging of No. 5 furnace. A magnificent sight, the refilling of an emptied furnace. It carries a thrill to the most calloused man of steel. Especially at night, when the half-mile length of floor as wide as a street is shrouded in darkness.

Three furnace doors raised high, a blast of light bursts out from the incandescent furnace behind them and spotlights a huge machine that grunts and grinds before them. It is a gigantic saw horse with machinery suspended between its legs, that charging machine. It straddles the floor on twenty-foot tracks with a train of loaded charging boxes between it and the doors to a man made hell. In action resembling an elephant, it sticks out a stiff, trunk-like bar and picks up those charging boxes one by one, thrusting them far into the furnace, dumping them, and returning them to their places, empty. It is a godsend, that machine. It relieves men of the enormous labor of shoveling tons upon tons of the stuff of steel. And one lone man, sitting far back at the rear where the furnace heat can not reach him, guides the mechanical beast with the precision of long practise, using switches and levers for goads. Through blue lensed glasses he can see each box go in, rotate, drop its contents and come back. If he took the time, he could see the heavy masses that are billet crop ends, distinguish the smaller pieces that resemble brushwood; but he does not. There are many boxes to empty and time is short. He does not deign to observe that the lighter pieces begin to melt the moment they are deposited in that earth melting heat.

"Seen Fredericks around?"

It was Calvert who asked the question of Goss; Calvert, the huge man who as general superintendent ate and slept—what little sleeping he did—steel. They had met on the busier side of the yard, where many lights sparkled through the drumming rain and a network of tracks tossed up reflections of them from their polished tops. Goss had remarked that Calvert was staying out pretty late, and Calvert replied with a chuckle.

"Yes. Been sitting up with Fredericks' baby." His great voice rumbled in his thick chest. "Got the producer going tonight. Seen it?"

Goss nodded, shaking water from the down turned brim of his hat.

"I was there when he turned on the blast," he said. "Is it going all right?"

"Fine."

"Yes—" Goss cocked his head and looked away over Calvert's shoulder, a listening look— "you can hear it."

There it was, trickling through the hiss of rain. It was puny and faint, but as distinct in its character as the voice of a foghorn.

"Sure enough," Calvert said. "Hadn't noticed it before." His voice eliminated the sound. "Mighty good thing, that

producer. It's going to solve our natural gas problem this winter." Then he asked the question. "Seen Fredericks around?"

Goss expected such inquiries. They were perfectly natural. Argo Steel covered a square mile of ground, and men in supervisory capacities were not infrequently lost in odd corners of the place for hours at a time. The only way to find them was to inquire. He replied with a steady voice.

"No; not lately. Looking for him myself. Got an idea for moving the scrap yard I want to talk over. Why? Want him?"

"I don't, but the ten-inch mill does. Tell him when you see him. What's this about the scrap yard?"

"It's too far away from the open hearth. It ought to be shoved over behind it."

"M-m-m! Not a bad idea. Funny nobody thought of it before. Figure it out, by all means. Next week's operating committee meeting will be a mighty good time to bring it up." Then he bent keen gray eyes upon Goss and asked another question. "Which one of you two figured out that coke cooling stunt?"

Goss permitted a slow smile to draw vertical lines beneath his cheekbones.

"Well, Fredericks polished it a little. Why?"

"I was wondering," said Calvert. There was an inscrutable twinkle in his eyes. "Guess a little sleep wouldn't hurt me any," he added. "Night."

He was gone, striding away through the rain toward the road that sloped up to the main office gate, and Goss had successfully encountered the first of what he knew would be an increasing number of inquiries before all questions ceased. That was natural. He had seen it happen before.

Other men had turned up missing in the great plant, for steel has a way of taking men to itself. Sometimes they go while other men stand by, helpless to save them; sometimes they just disappear. Then there is a search, with the searchers fearing the truth; many questions, to make absolutely sure; at last a surrender to the fact, and silence. Another man steps in to take the place of the missing one, the gap in the ranks is closed, and steel goes on. It has to, day and night, on and on. Goss hunched his shoulders to lift the collar of his raincoat up over his ears and went on with it.

THERE is nothing extraordinary about a producer gas plant. Not in a steel mill, where massive things are the tools of the men they dwarf. Goss knew that. He had watched the thing take shape day by day. But mid-morning found him standing beside it. The rain had stopped at sunup and the day was bright and clear. Every detail of the towering black bulk, freshly painted, was distinct. It was nothing but a huge retort of brick lined steel in which coal was turned into gas by slow combustion.

It stood there beside the ten-inch mill building like a section of smoke stack, its bottom ten feet above the ground, its top twenty feet higher. It was mounted on rollers and made to rotate by an electric motor, so slowly that its movement was almost imperceptible. Coal was fed into it from a hopper suspended above its water sealed top, and a blast of steam sighed up into it from the bottom through a pipe that rose out of the ground. Standing close beside it, a bell-like resonance was evident. It was a mechanical sound, not a human one.

"How d'you like it?"

Goss turned slowly about, knowing that the bright voice was that of Rogers, the sprightly young assistant to Fredericks. He was a peppy lad with alert blue eyes and a ready grin, and he had already created an enviable reputation for the speedy and precise execution of his duties. He would go far in steel. Goss liked him.

"Why, it seems to work pretty well," he replied, nor was it hard to produce a slow smile for this chap who made up for his lack of size by the magnitude of his energy.

"Ain't finished yet, o' course. Got to stick a wall around the charging floor up there. Mike would freeze to death next winter if we didn't. But she's workin'."

"Will it always sing like that?"

"Like what? Oh! Yep, can't help it. That blast has to go up through the coal. Makes it smolder, you know. Say, you haven't seen my fire eatin' boss around anywhere, have you?"

"No-o-o; not since last night." The answer came naturally. He had given it so many times this morning. "Why? Haven't you?"

"Not a sign. And believe me, I'm gettin' calls for him, too. Gosh, I ain't been so busy since the day I had the hives and a rush job on the draughtin' board. *Phe-e-e-e-yoo!*" His whistle—on the middle note—was identical with the sound of the blast. "He sure can leave a mess behind him when he takes a notion to duck out." He moved a little closer to Goss and lowered his voice a trifle. "An' just between you and me," he went on, "I'm gettin' a darn' sight more work done right now than I do when he's around. Workin' never did make me sick, but I do get kinda black and blue inside sometimes, the way he bawls me out."

"I don't believe I'd say that if I were you," Goss cautioned mildly. "He's a pretty good man. Have you called his house?"

"Hotel, you mean. Yeah, but they don't know where he is. Went out last night and hasn't come back. Not that I'm going to worry. Let personnel do that. They handle the search warrant stuff. Me, I'm too busy."

"Well, I hope they find him. I was wanting to talk over an idea about the scrap yard. Calvert says—"

"Talk it over by yourself, is my advice—if there's any rush on it. He won't have time when he does show up. He's prob'ly out runnin' around somewhere with a woman. That's all he talks about when he ain't ridin' me."

"I guess I will," said Goss, and turned away.

"And don't go to sleep before dark," Rogers called after him. "The last ten hours is the hardest."

To Rogers, yes; but not to Goss. He answered with a wave of his hand. Twenty-four straight was nothing to him. He had a way of plugging along, no matter how strenuous the job, as though sleep were totally unnecessary. And so it was through the rest of that day and several succeeding ones, when curiosity about Fredericks waxed more active.

For a man of Fredericks' position, however little his personal character may be admired, is bound to be missed. He was a minor executive, as important in his way as was the coughing engine that drove the blooming mill. His absence was sure to be noted in proportion. But "Get out the tonnage" is always more insistent than "Where is Fredericks?" Men inquired, searches were made, but as the days went by the major interest of the job assumed its proper place. Besides, Rogers was on hand to fill the vacancy left by Fredericks—just as the new sound of the producer blast had dropped into the gap made by a stopping engine.

There *was* a human timbre to that sound. It floated to Goss across the intervening roof of the ten-inch mill, and he lifted his head. It still carried the intonation of admiring amazement. "*E-e-e-e-e!* Some stunt!" it shrilled at him, as would a small boy who witnessed an awe inspiring feat; and beneath the imaginary lips that puckered for the whistle, imaginary fingers pointed, while above were eyes, widened in admiration. "*E-e-e-e!* Some stunt!"

Goss was infernally busy. There was a little matter of five carloads of firebrick coming in, ten carloads of bars going out, and a number of empty gondolas to be spotted besides—all with only one switch engine available and the shortest of sidings on which to effect the changes. But he left the job and walked around to the producer. Now it was nothing but a whistle.

He stood beside it and listened, as though to commit to memory the me-

chanical nature of the blast, and as he did so espied a gate valve on the steam line. He reached out and twisted the hand wheel down. No result. He screwed it down farther, until it was tight—and the whistle vanished. Relief? His eardrums seemed to loosen.

"Hey!"

That was Mike, the attendant who sat up there on the charging floor, and Goss twirled the handle back again. The shrilling came back. And as Goss put distance between himself and the sound, just so did its tone shift from that of a machine to that of a sentient being, emitting an endless, congratulatory breath . . .

"ANY SIGN of Fredericks yet?"

The booming voice was Calvert's. It came from the open doorway of the cubicle where Goss did his paper work, and Goss laid his pencil down and swung around deliberately.

"No; not for several days now."

Calvert grinned.

"Guess you could get along all right if he didn't show up, couldn't you?"

"Well, I did before he came here," Goss replied slowly. "Have you any news?"

"Personnel is making a report at committee meeting this noon. Got your scrap yard dope figured out?"

"Just finishing." Goss reached for a number of sheets of paper and handed them over, but Calvert waved them back.

"Haven't got much of an office to hide out in, have you?"

There was a sly twinkle in Calvert's eyes. His voice had a chuckle in it.

"No, my office is mostly under my hat," said Goss. "Not much chance to sit down on this job."

"It isn't getting your goat, is it? You look kind of run down." Then, before Goss could reply, "Be sure to get up there on time today. We're looking for you especially."

He chuckled, a deep chested rumble that had a little secret joke in it, and was gone. Goss stared at the place where he had stood.

Calvert had not been inaccurate when he spoke of a run down look. The keen gray eyes that had a way of spotting little things in the immensity of the plant he supervised had not been wrong. There were faint signs of wear visible upon the strong, square face; little marks, like those made by trickles of water upon a stone wall. There were one or two squinty lines about his eyes, in which there was a peeping look, as of a window, the curtains of which were being minutely parted by unseen fingers. There was a slight deepening of shadow beneath his cheekbones, the infinitesimal tightening of lips, as though a door already closed were being pressed tighter by a hand behind it. And now the pencil was turning over and over in his heavy fingers while he wondered what Calvert had meant. A grin and a chuckle. Some secret amusement . . . Rogers' head appeared in the doorway.

"What did he say?" he demanded excitedly. "Anything? There's a hen on at the main office. Did he say anything?"

Goss shook his head slowly.

"No, I can't say that he did. Why? What's up?"

"Something, I don't know what." Rogers came into the room and slid himself up on to a corner of the desk. His eyes were unusually bright and his speech very rapid. "It's like this: I had to call up Herring at the blast furnace, an' I had a little talk with Belle on the way. She's a friend of mine—works on the switchboard up there. Well, she couldn't say much, 'cause Lucy—that's the other girl, and a pug nosed, jealous little gossip she is, too!—well, she couldn't say much, but she says there's a lot of whisperin' goin' on up there. They call up and make dates and don't even talk over the telephone, and she knows it's something big. It's goin' to break at this noon meetin', too. And they asked me to show up today; what do you think o' that? S'pose they give me Fredericks' job—

Say, are you listenin' to me or not?"

"Of course I am," said Goss. "If they ask me who ought to take Fredericks' job, I'll back you for it. Maybe that's what is going to happen. Looks to me like Fredericks has—disappeared."

"Gosh! If they do!" Rogers' eyes blinked rapidly, then he sobered. "But they wouldn't do that much whisperin' about a little thing like that," he added. "Naw, there's a hen on, and— Gee! I got a million things to do before noon. See you later." And he was gone, as suddenly as he had come, leaving the little office silent.

Or was it silent? The blank eyed, listening look which Rogers had noted came back again. Yes. It was as silent as any mill office could be. Whatever noises there were in the air, there was no tiny whistle. And whatever the "hen" was, there was no doubting that the noon meeting would mark the official end of Fredericks. But in the meantime, there were one or two little matters that needed attention before he went up the hill. He stood up briskly, folded his papers and stowed them in his coat pocket, then left the office.

THE MEETING place was in the basement of the main office building, which from the hill commanded the two-mile strip of bottom land where the great buildings paraded. It was halfway down a central hall, a private dining room with bare walls and no furnishings except a long table set with places for thirty men. Light entered by way of two long windows set high enough in the front wall to give out over the sweep of lawn outside. It was a bright day, warm enough to make coats slightly uncomfortable, but always they were worn at these weekly meetings, so the windows were open. A welcome breeze sifted in, bearing the odor of freshly cut grass.

In such a place there was little evidence of the mill. The familiar faces of the men, yes; but that was all. From the hall outside came the chattering voices of the office force as they passed on to the adjoining cafeteria with its clattering dishes. It was pleasant to hear feminine voices on a temporary respite from routine, especially after the raucous industrial sounds that ruled over the bottomland. Those were all gone now, except for the occasional cough of the blooming mill engine when the breeze shifted.

Men were dropping in rapidly, greeting Goss and joking together as they took places about the table. Three chairs at the head were tilted forward against the table, indicating that Calvert expected to bring company with him; but the other chairs were soon filled. Roughly clothed men they were, all from the mill. Men who not infrequently worked with their hands, but men who wore the marks of authority. They were the ones who kept things going, who put spirit behind the rolls and fires.

There was Awkright, boss of the ten-inch mill; Fosdick of the twenty; Borden, open hearth superintendent, with his three assistants this time; Clark, from the electric furnaces; Herrick from the blast furnaces—a table surrounded by keen eyed plant executives. Full of laughter now while lunch was on. Later, when the meeting had begun, there might be strong words, heated arguments, as they fought for their own. Last of all came Rogers, who dropped into a chair that Goss had saved for him.

"Darn' near didn't get here at all," he said as he plunged a spoon into his cooling soup. "Some dirty bum put a lot of emery dust in the bearings of the producer motor; had to shut it down. If I ever catch that guy he'll wish he'd jumped into a furnace!"

"Too bad," murmured Goss. "Any idea who did it?"

"No. Some doggone Bullshevik, I s'pose. Gosh! Here comes the Old Man himself!"

So it was. Mr. Walters, president of Argo Steel, a hawk nosed gentleman whose well tailored neatness made him quite conspicuous in the crowd of mill men. And after him came Mr. Morrow,

the general manager, with Calvert in the rear. They passed along the table with a few greetings to the men, took the seats reserved for them and dropped into low voiced conversation.

Rogers nudged Goss and grinned.

"What did I tell you? Something's goin' to bust when those three come in together. And me with a busted producer to report—can you beat it?"

Goss advised that he stop worrying and eat his lunch, and by the time they had finished, Calvert was rapping on his water glass to call the meeting to order. There followed the scraping of chairs as the men turned to face the head of the table and lighted cigarets, pipes or cigars, then quiet.

"You men are going to hear some news today," Calvert began. His heavy voice was business-like; there was a formality about him that made his statement unnecessary. "It will surprise most of you, though I suspect that one or two of you have an idea of what's coming. First, though, there's—"

The rest was lost to Goss, whose every faculty was suddenly focused at his ears. Of late he had been able to listen to a talker and a sound at the same time, but now—the shock of its coming—*e-e-e-e!*—on the breeze that brought in the odor of new mown grass was enough to take all his attention. It was very faint, but it was growing more distinct. Strange, for even the heavy cough of the bloomer was inaudible. More than strange—impossible; for hadn't Rogers just said that the producer was shut down? He forced his attention back to Calvert.

"—unable to locate Fredericks. They have been compelled to resort to that unhappy proceeding—the report of his death by means unknown. And Mr. Rogers will take over his job."

There was a stir among the men, a turning of heads to toss winks and grins of congratulation toward the youngster, who was digging a sharp elbow into Goss's ribs. Goss replied by laying a hand on his shoulder and squeezing a friendly grip, while his eyes strayed toward the open windows. It was growing louder, coming nearer. And he was positive that it had been silenced! Calvert's voice:

"Now, no more interruptions, please, until I'm through. Then we can all talk." He coughed importantly. "This morning the board of directors approved a plan that has been under consideration for some time. We're going to double the capacity of the plant and—wait a minute!" He had to raise his voice to silence the outbreak. "Every man here is going to have a chance to talk later on. Work too, for that matter. It's going to be a big job."

Goss had dropped into his recently acquired habit. He was listening to Calvert with one ear and— It was growing louder!.

"I'm going to have an assistant who will devote his entire time to the details of this job," Calvert was saying. "He's a man from our own crowd. He probably knows more about this mill than any of us, and there's no question but what he thinks as much about it. He's proved it a good many times. He figured out an ore handling money saver some time ago; he put across a new wrinkle in coke cooling that's a whiz, and if I'm not mistaken, he has in his pocket right now a plan for saving money in the handling of scrap."

Two ears gone wrong. The one heard a sound when there was none, the other heard words that were unbelievable. Fredericks had taken the credit for those ideas, yet he, Goss, was being acknowledged as their creator. Calvert had grinned at him back there in his office; this was a joke. He had a promotion yet to earn, but it was being given him. Goss shook his head as though to shake off a confusing shroud, bent forward and supported his head with his hands, closing his eyes. The two sounds went on, each growing more distinct as in the self-made darkness he struggled to deny the one and accept the other.

The voice was saying:

"You ought to know who I mean by this time—the man who has been here

longer than any of us, who knows steel from ore pile to shipping scales—Goss!"

And the small, shrill voice was increasing in volume beyond any previous time. As though that massive smoke stack of a producer were striding up the hill on the steel beams that were its legs. *E-e-e-e-e!* pounded in his ears in spite of a babble of voices that drowned Calvert's. Its infernal pipe was mingling with congratulating men's voices.

A hand dropped on his shoulder. Rogers. A shrill, high pitched ejaculation rang out.

"*Phe-e-e-eyoo!*" and stopped, as human whistles do. "Hot dog! 'At's my old buddy! 'At's puttin' it over!"

And the other whistle carried on endlessly.

Goss lifted his head and opened his eyes. Staring eyes, that glittered as they darted about. They hunted for the sight of the monstrous black bulk.

A confusion of men struggled to reach him. Their hands were extended, their eyes were wide with surprised congratulation. Hands. And eyes. Reaching to him and staring at him. And—*e-e-e-e-e!*

He threw up his hands, thrust aside the ring of forward reaching hands, struck at the men behind them, and fled to the corner of the room. There, with his hands over his ears, he cowered, down, down, until he groveled on the floor. The men, silenced, gathered about him and the strident whine of the sound came through. Goss shrieked.

"I did it! I did it!" He babbled it from behind his arms, still enfolded about his head. "I killed him. I stuck him in a charging box. I—take it away! Fredericks is dead. Stop that whistle!" He fainted dead away.

While just outside the open window of the basement lunch room, milling about on the walk in front of the office, was a laughing group of stenographers and clerks. They were gathered about a brightly painted, rubber tired pushcart, quarreling gaily for the opportunity to buy from the Italian whose white teeth flashed his pride in the brand new vehicle. The focus of the assault was a box-like receptacle of polished copper. Its pyramid lid was raised to permit quick access to a nest of paper bags beneath. From one corner of the copper case rose a white mist of steam, indicating to the world by the shrill message of its escape through a tiny hole, that inside were peanuts, fresh roasted and hot.

The GOLD COAST

By T. SAMSON MILLER

THE LIVERPOOL boat rolls to the slow heaves of a turquoise sea that breaks a mile away into a blinding white surf. There is freight to be landed, via surf boats. I hang at the deck rail, getting my first sight of the Africa of Livingstone, Stanley and Rhodes.

The "mammy's chair" runs out at the end of a winch rope. I dangle in mid-air, looking down at a surf boat that now tops a swell, now drops into a deep trough. If I miss the connection, there are sharks aplenty to take care of me. The Kru paddlers of the surf boat grab the basket. I tumble out on a case of Manchester prints, and next moment a roll of the steamer snatches the basket away. Twelve Kru boys, seated on the gunwales, bend to their paddles.

I am about to set foot in Africa.

The Kru boys—black Vikings of the coasts—arrest the boat atop a breaking roller with strong back sweeps of their heavy paddles, watch for the crest of a bigger swell, and suddenly the boat is rushing toward Africa at breakneck speed. The keel grates high and dry, and I land on my head.

Between shacks of unpainted board and galvanized sheet iron is a street of sand, where impudent buzzards snatch plantain skins from black children and search out filth. Girls in gaudy cottons shamble along with kerosene cans of water. Corpulent negresses in gingham and antique millinery, such as are dug from attics when the missionaries sound their call for clothing for the poor naked heathen, indulge in public toilets on a narrow board walk, and babies feed on the bottle, and goats and chickens share shacks and street with humans.

Three buck Ethiopians—three gentlemen in tan derbies, striped trousers, patent shoes and lurid shirts—come down the sidewalk with linked arms, crowd me into the gutter, and leer insolently.

"Eat dat, white man, and like it!"

A lounging negro policeman guffaws. Africa challenges the dominant race. And what is a white man to do about it?

"Easy," says a voice at my back. "D'ye want to be hauled before a nigger judge?"

I turn, to see a paper white face under a huge sun helmet. Stubbled chin, dull eyes and drooping shoulders—a white who has known fever and disillusionment. He hales me to a gin shop, shambling along at an angle that carries his body by gravitation. A white behind a counter waits on both whites and blacks—impudent blacks who bellow their orders purposely to offend. My guide introduces me to the rag-tag of West Africa and the gin bottle.

My acquaintance looks me up and down, asks whither I am bound.

"The Niger!" he echoes enviously. "You're in luck. The niggers up there aren't spoiled like here. A white on the Niger is respected. Up there if a nigger gives you a mean look you jerk your knee into his stomach, and he respects you ever after. Here, the government policy is government for the blacks by the blacks. Whites have no prestige."

The surf boat puts me back aboard ship, a little less green, and less buoyant.

SILT

By BARRY LYNDON

THE GRAF VON BÜCHMANN snapped his fingers as he paused in the center of the elegant stateroom, and his monocle flashed when it caught the light of a North Sea dawn, glimmering through the wide open porthole.

He could see his men rigid at their stations on the deck of the *U-149*, with its 5.9's trained on the abandoned ship that he was inspecting. The Graf nodded approvingly and turned his attention to the fittings of the stateroom.

For an *Unterseeboot* commander he was immaculate: no oil flecks marred his tailored uniform; his nails were manicured and his boots were highly polished. His lean jaw was beautifully shaven, and

careful massage had wakened color in his tight lips.

"Lanzweig!"

Heels clicked behind him.

"That—and that carpet!" He nodded to a silver smoking companion, then to a narrow Persian carpet on the floor. "And—ah!" He viewed his taut muscled figure in the full length mirror which covered the inside of the door. "That also, Lanzweig, and bring the door as well. Possibly the red silk cushion there would lend—*die Heiterkeit, ei?*—cheerfulness to my quarters."

It amused the Graf von Büchmann to select souvenirs, when opportunity offered, from Allied vessels before he sank them. This fast little merchantman had been a private yacht, and some of her fittings remained as peace time relics. She was small beer to the *U-149*, of course, but still amusing.

Büchmann strode on deck. His shells had reduced part of the superstructure to a mess of cordage, twisted iron and torn woodwork, and the vessel now had a list. She would not sink, he judged, until Lanzweig had transferred his souvenirs, but, for safety's sake, he stepped to the waiting boat alongside.

This was a lifeboat which he had commandeered from the doomed craft. That survivors should be crowded in the remaining boats, by reason of his whim, mattered nothing; they would probably not be picked up, anyhow.

He returned to the *U-149*. In due course his souvenirs were installed, and he used the door to shut off the officers' quarters from the control room; the door just fitted the passageway, and its mirror was useful when he dressed.

His comfortably fitted, steel walled cubicle was much admired when he put in at his base to report and refit.

He was ordered to sea again rather hurriedly, departing without the trusty Lanzweig and some few other men who were on leave. The *Nachrichteramt* had received news of an Allied bullion ship leaving Liverpool for New York, and there was a chance that the *U-14* might trap her.

The Graf von Büchmann sank the bullion ship according to orders, after removing gold to the value of a million dollars; this was a little disappointing, because the *Nachrichteramt* had reported five millions.

Büchmann's disappointment did not worry him for very long, because the British destroyers, which he had cleverly outwitted, cornered the *Unterseeboot* at Needle Bank, off the Kerry coast.

One of their depth charges brought a spreading circle of oil to the surface.

When the destroyers steamed away, the *U-149* had a hole torn well forward of of the control room. The gray sea raider was lying upside down, with her 5.9's buried in silt and thirty fathoms of water above her keel.

II

BILL MERRILL sprawled on his chest and raked at the silt with his hands. Every little while his diving helmet would come into contact with the deck of the submarine, so that sound rang deafeningly about his ears.

The light from his handlamp played on the stirred silt, and just caught the wrenched shape of the *U-149's* forward gun, past the breech of which he was tunneling.

"Nearly finished, Bill?"

The voice came to his ears along the slender telephone wire which led up to the International Salvage Syndicate's boat on the surface. He gasped into the mouthpiece, poking out before his lips—

"I shall be when I've got that chain!"

"Better let it ride, Bill, and get it tomorrow. You've been down too long already, and we—"

"Got it!"

His panted exclamation sounded exultantly. His groping fingers touched the steel pilot rod of the chain; he gripped it and worked himself clumsily backward until he was clear of the dangerous little tunnel he had excavated.

He got to his feet and dragged the chain clear. The crusted side of the sub-

marine reared beside him, canted forward on her squat, half buried conning tower. Just above, a powerful electric light glowed, shielded from pressure by stout glass. Silt danced and swirled in its beam, like dust motes in the sun, as he pulled the chain taut and then cleared the pilot rod from its clamp.

Temporarily rope lashed to the U-boat's upturned keel was the black shape of a pontoon. From one side hung a chain, and Bill needed to hook his own chain on to this, when the circle about the sunken craft would be completed.

The salvage company was bringing up the *U-149* with the intention of breaking her for scrap, after the bullion had been removed. Pontoons fore and aft would, when filled with air, help lift her to the surface; in addition, her hull was being made leak-proof, so that the water could be blown out to help carry the vessel to the top. The diver attending to this emerged from the sunken craft while Bill was struggling with his chain.

The man came out through the hole which the depth charge had made. The great cavity showed mistily where the crew's quarters had been, behind the forward torpedo room. It provided an easy entrance to the submarine, and up on the salvage boat's deck was a huge, carefully made plate which, when the time came, would be bolted over the hole to block it.

"I'm just going to link up the chain, then I'll be through," Bill called into the telephone. "Only a couple of minutes more now! I'll get Lanzweig to lend a hand."

He turned in the swirling murk and beckoned the other diver over, then signaled with his chain to the one above. Georg Lanzweig slithered toward him; he put his helmet close to Bill's, grimaced silently through the front lens, gestured negatively and then moved off.

Bill watched him go, with the muck puffing up from his leaded shoes. He might have known that the German diver would not aid him, he thought, and he turned his attention to the job in hand.

He eased his release valve gently, trapping air in his suit and gaining buoyancy, then jumped for the pontoon. It was a dangerous trick, and he clung to the side of the black hulk as he worked the valve back to normal. In a minute he had the chain ends clamped home.

He dropped back slowly to the sea bed.

Bill turned toward the bows. It was quite a trip, because the *U-149* was over three hundred feet long and had carried a crew of eighty-odd men. They had got most of them out, and they had been sent back from Needle Bank to rest in their Fatherland; a British warship had taken them, rendering homage to men undeniably valiant, whatever their method of waging war.

A second electric light guided Bill to where a staging rested on the soft bottom. It was just a lead weighted wooden grating, and Lanzweig was already sitting on it.

"Hoist away!" Bill called as he reached it. "Don't forget to put some gramophone records on for us."

"We'll look after that. Sit tight."

The grating began to move slowly upward with its light. As it went, Bill seated himself on the edge with the German diver, slipping an arm through a safety strap. The rigged lamp, traveling with them, showed him Lanzweig's face behind the lenses.

Bill could see the German's fair, cropped hair and his pale eyes, glowing. Lanzweig's lips moved as he spat a silent curse.

Bill grinned cheerfully. Then he heard the scratch of a gramophone needle, and after that a lively tune came merrily down the telephone wire.

THE THIRTY fathoms in which the U-boat lay is almost the limit to which men can dive in anything but armored dress. At that depth, a descent lasting more than an hour becomes distinctly dangerous.

Working under pressure has a curious effect on a diver's blood, which grows full

of little nitrogen bubbles. His ascent must be made cautiously and slowly, so that the nitrogen disappears as the pressure is gradually released.

The staging took three minutes to rise ten feet, when Bill and Lanzweig were kept at that depth for a quarter of an hour; ten feet higher they stopped for twenty-five minutes. And so on, rising in slow, ten-foot movements, which meant a three-hour journey before their helmets broke water.

That was why Bill wanted to make sure about the gramophone records. It helped to pass the time to listen to them; otherwise there would have been nothing to do except sit and think. When there had been four of them on this job—before the trouble with Lanzweig—they had played with lead weighted cards.

They had been rather odd, slow, clumsy games, with each diver sitting at one side of the grating. It was Bill's idea, and was certainly novel, although it was not often that all four had dived together.

In any case, Bill now had plenty to think about, and his thoughts centered mostly round Georg Lanzweig. He was doing the interior leak stopping because, as a one time member of the *U-149's* crew, he knew more about her than any one else.

He had been hired for the job for this reason, also because he had done almost as much deep sea work as Bill himself. The Baltimore depot had sent Bill over to the European headquarters of the salvage company especially to work on the U-boat. Like Lanzweig, he was big and tough and could stand the long job on the bottom; both the other divers had gone sick.

Bill had seen the Graf von Büchmann's cubicle, with its silk lined bunk and stolen pictures riveted to the walls, its soiled silver fittings and its sodden cushions. They had brought up his gold mounted shaving kit and sent it to his folk with some other personal stuff.

Bill had seen the bullion too. It was stored in two bulkheads, and was not too easy to get at, down below. Bill's report had shown that it was better to leave the gold where it was until the submarine came up, because there was no doubt about the salvage operation being successful.

The bullion was the seat of the trouble between Bill and Lanzweig. The German could see no reason why he and Bill should not remove a couple of hundred thousand dollars' worth, cache it and dive for it when operations were concluded.

The thing was easy to do; there was no doubt of that. Only Bill had no kink that way. He just was not interested. Lanzweig had been antagonistic ever since Bill's refusal, even though Bill had not so much as hinted to the chief what was in the German diver's mind.

Lanzweig's manner had grown more and more vicious after each dive so that, instead of working together, they met only on the leaded staging. It rather puzzled Bill; he could understand the way Lanzweig was being tempted, but there seemed no real reason for such calculated vindictiveness.

The gramophone played record after record, as the two sat with air bubbles streaming up from their helmets, like inverted and elongated pyramids of pearls. Presently the instrument ceased and one of the crew above read items from a newspaper; he was succeeded by the chief, who came on the wire to take Bill's report, and then Lanzweig's.

The chief returned to Bill's phone presently and, before he spoke, Bill heard the click which switched Lanzweig off the wire so that he could not hear the voice from the deck.

"Lanzweig doesn't seem to know how much more work he's got to do inside," the chief said. "When you go down tomorrow, I want you to take a look round and calculate how long he'll be. Both air locks are fixed, and when he's finished all we've got to do is to clamp that plate over the hole and blow her to the surface. Lanzweig ought to be through by now, anyhow!"

"I'll crawl all over her and make a full

report after my first dive," Bill answered.

As he spoke he noticed that Georg Lanzweig carried a knife hitched to the weight cords at his waist.

And a knife was a quite unnecessary weapon in safe water like that at Needle Bank.

EARLY morning sunshine lighted the steel deck of the salvage company's steamer. Men were checking over the pumps and diving kit, and at the other side of the deck Bill leaned on the rail, watching a small school of porpoises playing, with their black, spray hazed shapes dipping and rolling against the water.

He wore heavy woolen underclothing, in readiness for his dive, a peaked cap and a heavy overcoat to protect him against the cool air. He smoked the stump of a cigaret slowly, wondering if it would last out until the crew was ready.

He heard the shuffling of Lanzweig's socks on the steel plating, and turned. The big German had paused behind him, massive in his woolens and without a coat. His jutting brows beetled above his narrowed eyes, and the nostrils of his bulbous nose were pinched in. He glanced around, to make certain that none was within earshot, then grunted—

"One las' chance I gif you now—unnerstan'?"

"I've told you already that I'm no get-rich-quick hound." Bill grinned a little. "So far as I'm concerned, that stuff stops where it is until we bring the old tub to the top."

"So!" Lanzweig stepped nearer, and his throaty tone was grating. "You are afraidt, *nicht wahr?*"

"Call it that if you like," Bill said shortly.

"A fortune—so easy as that!" The German snapped his finger and thumb in Bill's face. "I lose it because—" he came still closer, and his voice was a snarl; his eyes blazed wickedly and his hairy fists bunched—"because you are afraid, *ja!* The goldt is war booty, any man's for the taking, unnerstan'? It iss prize money on my *Unterseeboot*, andt I seek my share. But you—"

"I don't want to talk about it, Georg, and if you were to monkey with it you'd get yourself jumped on. You bet there's a check on the stuff."

"Maybe you are thinking of a way to get it wit'oud me?" Lanzweig asked. "That cunning iss."

"You can cut that out; I'm no thief!" Bill growled. "Lay off this kind of talk; I'm not in it, hang you! Call me a thief again, anyway, and I'll knock your square block off your shoulders!"

"*Schlaukopf!*" Lanzweig blazed suddenly. "*Schweinhund! Ich gebe—*"

"If you want to call me fancy names, do it in a language I can understand!" Bill ripped out as he faced him squarely. "Shoot any more of that stuff and I'll soak your jaw, on chance!"

"*Dummer Junge!*" the German blared, and lashed out madly.

His bunched knuckles cut the skin on Bill's cheek with a punch that jarred his head. Then Bill slipped Lanzweig's left and packed a hundred and ninety pounds of huskiness behind a fist that cracked between the German's eyes.

The weight of the punch staggered Lanzweig against the wall of the deck-house behind. He let out a roar, charged in again, and then the two were fighting down the deck.

Lanzweig loosed wind sapping, bone shaking punches, his great torso heaving and lurching as he tried to pin Bill back against the rail. Bill hit with shattering, full armed swings which beat the German off and, at last, a smash to the pit of the stomach doubled him momentarily, leaving his jaw uncovered for a crushing right smash.

The blow dropped the German in a heap to the deck, but he came off it, snarling. It was the first time that anything living had knocked his massive bulk off its own two feet. He was bigger and heavier than Bill, and he tensed all his weight to back a devastating rush—only to feel some of the pump crew grabbing

him from behind, while others hauled at Bill.

"Let him go!" Bill panted. "I don't know what he called me, but he doesn't get away with it!"

He plunged to break loose; more men caught him and held him back. Like Lanzweig, he fought to free himself, but the milling stopped when the chief came clumping along the deck.

He was a red faced Englishman, and he ruled the boat with a discipline to which even Bill had to respond. Lanzweig stopped scrapping too.

The chief wanted to know what the trouble was about, but he got no satisfaction.

"I'd expect a bit of bother from a bad tempered devil like him—" he nodded toward Lanzweig— "but you should be able to control yourself, Bill. I don't want this job spoiled just because you two can't agree. Get down below now; maybe thirty fathoms will cool the pair of you off."

The diving crews were careful to keep between the two as they donned their kit. While Bill's legs were being laced behind, as a precaution against being blown accidentally to the surface, he saw that Lanzweig was glaring at him. Their corselets went on, then Bill slid his feet into the lead soled shoes, and it was as their straps were buckled over that the chief came to him.

"Don't forget that I want you to inspect the interior," he said quietly. "But. first thing, I want you to cut both pontoons free. They're only roped down. Cut them away, then we'll put air into them so they ride high. There's a bit of swell coming up, and I don't want them to bash against the keel. Here's a knife."

He snubbed the sheath to the cord at Bill's waist.

"Fix it the other side," Bill told him. "I'm left handed." He went on, "I'll free the pontoons, then I'll go into the sub through the stern air lock."

The chief nodded and stepped away. Lanzweig had moved nearer Bill, waiting for his helmet. Bill noticed that the German had been listening, and he heard him rasp:

"Later I finish mit you! We—" He checked as his helmet was lifted.

Soon the copper domes were both screwed on and Bill lifted his arms for the lines to pass beneath his armpits. Both shuffled to the little staging as the pumps began their plodding song.

"So long, good dive!" the chief called.

A man screwed up Bill's front lens; he and Lanzweig tested the phone lines and gave "O.K." Then the staging began to sink.

The chief leaned over the rail as he watched them start to submerge, and his second bent at his elbow.

"Think they'll be all right, sir? Georg's got it in for Bill—and it wouldn't do if they started scrapping down below!"

The chief frowned. He watched the water lapping up to the sinking, shining helmets.

"I don't think there's a lot in it, although I'd sooner send them down separately, but we want to get the job finished. They can't talk to one another, so they can't quarrel!" He watched the bubbles coming up and breaking; above the thumping of the pumps sounded the duller *chock-sweeeee-chock!* of the shotted line as it ran out and let the grating down. He added, "Still, I don't like it!"

Behind them a man checked off the descent. It was as he saw the thirty-fathom lead slide under the water that Bill's voice came from below, saying that they were down.

Almost in the same moment, the telephone attendant heard Lanzweig snarl—

"*Dummer Junge!*"

"*DUMMER JUNGE!*" when spoken by a German sounds pretty bad, and quite a lot of Teutonic blood has been spilled because of the epithet. It means "Fool!" —but the "fool" is subtly qualified and, as an insult, "*Dummer Junge*" ranks high.

Bill, however, knew nothing of the meaning of the expression. Neither did

he heard Lanzweig say it as he stepped off the grating. Bill was sucking an acid drop and swallowing hard to clear his eustachian tubes as he moved toward the submarine's bows.

Lanzweig started to follow him, but one of his lines fouled a mess of weed and a cable from the grating. He tugged to get it free, but only tightened it. It was a couple of minutes before he worked it clear, and by that time Bill's handlamp showed only as a misty glow in the gloom all around.

Lanzweig came off the grating with his shoes sinking into the silt. He watched Bill's lamp go up beyond the bows as he cut away the pontoon's ropes. By the main light, anchored near the U-boat's half hidden conning tower Lanzweig saw the cleared pontoon roll like a whale's back. Then Bill's lamp was moving on along the keel.

Lanzweig shuffled slowly over the sea bed beside the *Unterseeboot* which, but for a lucky leave, might have taken him to his death, as it had taken the Graf von Büchmann and the rest. He moved slowly; he knew that Bill would free the second pontoon and then go down through the stern air lock to begin his inspection.

Lanzweig calculated that if he himself entered through the hole the depth charge had made, he would meet Bill in the control room. That suited him—and Bill already knew too much.

If he were allowed to investigate the submarine, he would find that all her leaks had long since been caulked and closed; he would discover, also, that rough tackle had been rigged by which Lanzweig meant to try to extract part of the bullion single-handed.

Lanzweig needed time for that job. He would have preferred help, but since Bill had finally and definitely shown his attitude by the fight on deck, Lanzweig would do the thing alone.

But time was very necessary. If Bill reported the U-boat fit for raising they would send the shaped hull plate down straightaway, and another dive would see the air locks working. The boat would be on top inside twenty hours, taking the gold with it.

Because of the natural venom of his nature, and because of his scheme, Lanzweig was going to see that Bill met with an accident inside the *U-149*. He would then never make his report, and Lanzweig would gain all the time he wanted to remove a hundred or maybe two hundred thousand dollars in gold.

He had it planned out, as he stood and watched the shuddering glow of Bill's lamp go toward the aft pontoon. They would meet about the control room; one slash with the knife should cut through Bill's telephone wires or nick the insulation sufficiently to make the water short them. The same slash would sheer through his air line, so that he would drown.

It would look as though he had cut it on something sharp inside the boat, or had ripped his line where the depth charge had left jagged edges in the side of the vessel. Lanzweig, as he paused by the cavity, reminded himself to be careful of these edges when he went in.

He remained by the black gap. Bill's handlamp was now at the stern pontoon, fully two hundred and fifty feet away and hard to distinguish.

Lanzweig strained his gaze through the glass to watch it until, suddenly, it disappeared. That, he knew, meant that Bill had gone down the stern air lock into the main motor room.

The German diver stepped carefully through the hole in the side. The silt which had drifted there rose in slow stirring clouds that fogged everything. Careful to clear his lines and reach in plenty of slack, he moved to the roof of the passageway.

Behind him was the torpedo room, once familiar to him but strange now with everything inverted and misted from the floating silt. Before him was the passage which ran through the crew's quarters.

His light shone on the upsidedown bunks, on water filled rags of blankets and a jammed down, hair stuffed pillow which had split and which always sent some of

its contents floating out when he stirred the water as he passed.

He lifted his feet to try not to disturb the silt. But it was very fine stuff that had drifted in there; it rose in filmy streaks which merged into swelling clouds.

He entered the officer's quarters and then, twenty feet ahead of him, he saw the misty glow of Bill's lamp. Lanzweig drew his knife and his heart kicked as he sucked in his breath and went on more quickly.

The swift rising silt swirled ahead of him, but he made out Bill's figure coming in from the control room to meet him. Lanzweig saw the basilisk lens at the front of his helmet, and he saw that Bill's left hand gripped the knife with which he had cut the pontoon's ropes.

Lanzweig grunted and started a blundering rush. He saw Bill's crouching, foggy figure lurching through the water to meet him. The German's armed hand went up, and he saw Bill's knife lift for a thrust.

Lanzweig was at him in a last, sudden rush, his blade whipping to block the misty glimmer of Bill's weapon, and at the same time, to strike at the lines running up from under his arms.

The German's knife drove jarringly home, and he staggered sidewise. What felt like a knife gash burned suddenly along his arm, and he sensed the icy touch of water as it rushed through the slit fabric of his sleeve.

He yelled. Water was rushing into his suit, swelling the rubber fabric, swamping him. He tried to clamp the torn sleeve down around his arm, but it was stiff with water and he could not compress it.

He felt the water against his chin. He shouted wildly. He heard the telephone man's voice in his ears, but it was blurred out as water flooded his face.

He turned and tried to go back the way he had come, but the weight of water and the pressure brought him down.

When a diver's suit is slit and water gets into it, he lives for just as long as it takes a man to drown.

"BILL! Where are you now?"

"Hello? I'm still on the stern pontoon. This knife couldn't cut hot butter and—ah, there she goes. That's freed her—she's rising!"

"Never mind about that pontoon, Bill; see what's happened to Lanzweig! We heard a couple of shouts from him, and now we can't get any answer."

"Where is he?"

"We don't know. He hasn't spoken since he went down, except to say something in German when you touched bottom. Better follow his lines."

"I'm on my way," Bill called. "Trace me, in case there's trouble. I can't see his light yet. I'm under the main lamp, and there's something ahead—looks like his lines. Yes, he's gone in the hole."

"Follow him. Hurry up, but go steady!"

Bill trailed the lines through the big gap. He caught the glow of Lanzweig's lamp, then he made out the man himself. He was rolled half into the Graf von Büchmann's cubicle, with his diving suit deflated and pressed tightly against his body. His right arm was crooked upward, and Bill saw that the sleeve was torn from wrist to elbow, where air was escaping as fast as the pumps above drove it into his helmet.

Bill bent over him wonderingly, and he saw that Lanzweig was dead.

Through the filming silt he made out the wooden door which cut off the officers' quarters from the control room. Rammed into the woodwork, high up, was Lanzweig's knife. Below it, caught in the frame, showed fragments of the full length mirror which the Graf von Büchmann had taken as a souvenir.

Bits of the glass gleamed near Lanzweig, and a sliver was caught in his torn sleeve.

"He saw his own reflection in the mirror, and thought it was me coming along from the air lock—and he went for me with his knife!" The thought whipped through Bill's brain. "I'm left handed, and it must have looked as though I was defending myself. He smashed the glass and cut his suit. Lord!"

A Novelette

in which a cocky young police reporter matches wits with a boss gangster

By HENRY LaCOSSITT

IT HAD rained all of the morning; but with noon the sun came out and a breeze blowing south over Lake Erie swept the storm away. The Town emerged briskly into the fresh afternoon.

The freshness of the afternoon, perhaps, was what caused young Amos Whipple to decide to drive to work. Amos could not, in the ordinary course of his life, have driven his car to work. Neither, in fact, could he have owned a car—he worked in the police station and did not make much money—but circumstance had endowed him with a possession beyond his means: he had won the car in a raffle. It was a long greyhound of mechanism, painted flaming red and trimmed with brass, contained eight cylinders, and was a Packard. And Amos was overwhelmingly proud of it. Therefore, he would drive it to work today, even if he did get razzed for it. He was a cub police reporter for the *Globe*, leading morning daily of the Town, and his fellow members of the press made cutting remarks, usually, about his new property.

So he got his car and drove down Euclid Avenue. The car itself attracted attention on that bright day, but so did Amos. He was young and he was healthy. His hair was brown, cut short, and now, since he wore no hat, towsled over his head. His eyes were wide and hazel, and his mouth, while it betrayed boyishness, was firm, and beginning to show traces of determined character. And his arms and shoulders, seen above the body of the car, were evidence of a tall and well knit body.

As he pulled away from 105th Street with a changing signal, he caught sight of a large green touring car to his left. In it were a man and woman and, Amos saw, the woman was strikingly pretty. But the pickup of his Packard was greater than that of the other car, and Amos passed it while yet in low gear. But it caught up with him again at the red light at 93d Street.

Amos looked up, suddenly reminded that the green car held a beautiful woman. And when he did, he was startled to find that she was looking at him. She was clad in a green frock and a green cloche only partially covered her lustrous red hair. The green of her clothes was lighter than the color of the car. They were Nile green, and Amos saw that the color nearly matched her eyes. He saw also—the cars were less than a foot apart—that her skin was quite white and that her cheeks, which were unrouged, accentuated the redness of her lips, which were rouged. He noticed, also, that her eyes were smiling.

When the green car pulled away, Amos followed it until the yellow light at 81st Street caused its driver—who, Amos had

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noticed for the first time, was a thickset man—to slow down. Once more he came abreast the green car and again his gaze met the green eyes. The eyes held him now. But the light changed quickly.

This time, however, he remained abreast the green car, and as they rolled along he cast sidelong glances at the woman. She still watched him, and now Amos saw something else. The man driving the car had become aware of the situation. He looked around the woman, who was young—younger, Amos could see, than himself—and Amos, in rapid survey, saw a gross, unpleasant face. The man wore a straw hat that shaded his eyes, but Amos knew they were hard eyes. He saw, also, that the man's mouth was loose lipped. This was, of course, for the most part an impression, a vague idea, for Amos was driving, but he knew, instinctively, that it was accurate.

It was at 35th Street that he stole another of these glances. As he did, the driver of the green car looked around the girl and mouthed a curse. The girl, startled, turned to him. As she did, Amos went abruptly about the business of driving and saw, out of the corner of his eye to the right, a bright blue roadster come abreast his Packard and the green car. He saw also that the driver of the blue roadster was looking across the Packard and laughing at the driver of the green car.

In the green car the driver was quarreling with the girl, and Amos saw that she was frightened. The man was raging, and Amos was debating whether he should slow and let the two cars pass him, or speed away from them, when he heard a muffled scream. He turned, to see the girl grab her driver's arm. And then he had no time to see anything, for the driver of the green car shook off the girl.

The green car veered to the right. Amos swerved to the right. The blue roadster turned to avoid Amos. The green car continued to veer to the right. Amos continued to swerve to the right. The blue roadster paralleled the other two cars . . .

Amos felt a heavy jolt as he charged over the curbing and to the parking. He jammed his brakes. When he stopped, he saw that the blue roadster was entirely on the parking, that the front half of his Packard was on the parking and the rear wheels in the street, and that the green car's front wheel was touching the curb. The automobiles were abreast and parallel, obliquely pointed away from the center of the street.

Amos felt a rush of fury as he thought of his Packard. He started to get out to meet the driver of the green car, but when he opened his door, the other was waiting for him. He did not know that, but he soon found out. As he stepped from his car, head down, angry and intent, he felt another jolt. His head snapped back and he fell against the brakes and gear lever of his car.

For a moment he felt numb. Then the acrid taste of blood welled in his mouth. He looked up and saw the man with the hard eyes, the loose lips and the straw hat, charging him. And in that instant his head cleared. The numb daze departed and wrath returned.

AMOS met the charge of the man with the straw hat with both feet and pushed him back. The man fell against the running board of the green car and by the time he was up, Amos was ready. And Amos was big and shifty. His wide shoulders and big arms swung into action and the man with the straw hat toppled backward again. This time, however, the loose lips spilled blood and the hard eyes were glassy. But the man rose again. And again he went back. He got up once more, and to meet a waiting Amos, but he got up, also, with his right arm under his coat and reaching, evidently, for a bulge under his left armpit.

Amos knew what that bulge was. He caught a glimpse of the horrified girl above and started a rush to grapple with the man who had worn the straw hat. But it never really got under way . . .

"Stop that!"

The voice was commanding. Amos stopped. It belonged to the man in the blue roadster. He was standing up on the seat of his car, arms akimbo, watching the scene. He was bareheaded and coatless, and his shirt was open at the throat. Not very large, yet he gave an appearance of strength and height. His face was boyish and pleasant, but had a distinct cast of shrewdness that gave him a curious vulpine look. His eyes were blue. Just now he smiled, as he glanced from Amos to the man who had worn the straw hat, and at the girl. When his eyes rested on the girl, his strange face became a mirror of confused emotions. Accusation, bitterness, tenderness, affection, crossed it and twisted it, and then he smiled again, a wide, pleasing smile. For a few seconds he stood, and Amos warmed to the smile.

"Don't you guys have any modesty?"

asked the man in the blue roadster. "Look at the gallery you got."

Amos looked, and for the first time saw that a crowd had gathered. They watched, eager for him to swing his wide shoulders and big arms into action again.

The man who had worn the straw hat fixed his hard eyes on the man in the blue roadster.

"Well, what's it to you?" he said.

"Maybe somethin', maybe nothin'; only you damn' near wrecked me too, Maxie."

"Yeah? You had to nose in, didn't you? That's hot!" He reached in his pocket and drew out a handkerchief. He wiped his mouth, which was bleeding, and turned to Amos. "Wise guy, ain't you?" he said to Amos.

"No," said Amos, "and you might 'a' killed me."

"You damn' right I might 'a' . . . Maybe I will, if you ever get frequent with my gal again, see? You—"

"Hey! What happened here?"

A cop was pushing his way through the crowd. He surveyed the cars. Then his eyes narrowed and he made a tentative gesture towards his hip when he saw Max and the man who drove the blue roadster. He paid little attention to Amos.

"Never mind, officer," said the man in the blue roadster. "Maxie and I ain't gonna start any works." He laughed. "Are we, Max?"

"No," said Max, but he was sullen.

"Well," said the cop, obviously puzzled, "since when did you an' Maxie get clubby, Eddie?" He looked suspiciously from one to the other, still ignoring Amos, who began to understand, a little, the situation.

"We ain't what you'd call clubby," said Eddie. "But we had a little accident, an' we're just tryin' to straighten it out. This guy here an' Maxie pretty near had a smashup."

The cop looked hard at Amos.

"Who're you?" he asked.

Amos told him.

"What do you do?"

Amos flashed his reporter's badge.

"I'm on the police beat—newspaper."

"The hell you are," said the cop. "Well—say," he continued, looking at Amos' Packard, "ain't that bus in front of the station every night?"

"Yes," said Amos, "it is. I park it there almost every night."

"Well," said the cop, "I guess everything's all right. Get movin'."

Maxie got into the green car. He scowled deeply at Amos and the man addressed as Eddie as he drove off. As he left, the crowd began to break up; and as he left, the girl in Nile green turned and looked back. Her look at Eddie was grateful, yet crossed by, it seemed to Amos, a certain pain and shame. Then she was looking at him and she smiled. He smiled back and got into his Packard. He backed it off the parking. Eddie backed his blue roadster off, too. Amos was about to start down the street . . .

"Hey!"

Amos turned around in his seat.

"Wait a minute," said Eddie.

He got out of his roadster and walked up to Amos's car. He stopped and leaned on the door by Amos.

"I guess you know," he went on, "who that guy in the green car is, now, don't you?"

"Yes."

"And I guess you know who I am?"

"Yes," said Amos, and lighted a cigaret.

Eddie laughed.

"It's funnier'n hell, ain't it, how I happened along? You just about had that gal made. Maxie thinks she's his moll, but she ain't. She ain't his kind, more'n she's my kind." Eddie threw a cigaret he had just started to the pavement and crushed it viciously. "She oughtn't to run with him. She's a real gal."

"What's her name?" broke in Amos.

Eddie glared at Amos. The glare changed and became a keen study.

"You—" he began, and then stopped. "Rucker," he said, in answer to Amos's question. "Jane Rucker."

"Rucker?"

"Yeah, Rucker—Tim's daughter. Tim gave her everything—wanted her to be upstage. She is, too. Got a lot o' money when Tim was bumped off. Maxie wants her hard—harder, I guess, than he wants to get me. She— Well, never mind . . ."

Eddie stopped. His face was bitter. But he shrugged wearily.

"That ain't my business," he went on. "She won't pay me much mind. You, now— Oh, hell, never mind. Say, I ain't talked like this to anybody for a long time." He smiled again. "But I kinda like you, boy. Oh, well, see you later— Say, that's a swell bus. Why don't you enter it in the State Theater auto show?" He laughed. "So long."

"So long," said Amos. "Maybe I will."

Eddie went back to his car. Amos started his.

"Say!" Eddie called back. Amos turned. "Call me up sometime. I might give you a break if it don't concern my racket too much." He laughed.

Amos took off down the street. He looked at his watch. It was 4:30. He had half an hour to get to work.

HE DROVE leisurely and wondered. But also he was amused. He had, unwittingly, stumbled into a situation that had been the talk of The Town for years. For Tim Rucker had been famous.

His real power, Amos knew, had come with prohibition. He had assembled equipment and men and he had run liquor from Canada. He became almost a legend and every one knew of his daughter, Jane, on whom he lavished his money and his love. It was said that he scorned the more legal paths out of sheer love of his dangerous occupation, but that, probably, was part of the legend. He was, however—and this was no legend—a very courageous and dangerous man, and terrible in enmity. Also, he was ardent in his love, and The Town still talked of handsome Tim Rucker, the gambler, who had seen Jane Lingle, the actress, in a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, and had stormed her, swept her from the stage and married her.

She was Jane Rucker's mother and she had died in her travail.

But all this last had been long ago and was part of the legend. Amos had heard it from the old newspapermen, and he had heard, also of the later events of Tim Rucker's life.

He had heard of his daring liquor runs, of his mob, of his fights and his victories. He had heard, also, of Maxie Greenberg, the Jew, and of Eddie Egan, the Irishman, who became the lieutenants of Tim Rucker.

And Amos had heard of that stormy night in early December, when Tim Rucker, in command of a fleet of rum ships, had crossed Lake Erie from Canada, with Maxie Greenberg aboard, and Eddie Egan and Eddie's buddy, Spike Donovan, ashore, waiting in trucks for the cargo. A mile out there suddenly had appeared the Coast Guard fleet. Something in the vast system Tim Rucker had built had failed; there had been a leak.

Eddie Egan and Spike Donovan, watching from the shore, saw the fight. And they had driven away, sobbing in helplessness, as they saw how it was going.

Tim Rucker had died, shot through and through; Maxie Greenberg had lived and slipped ashore.

He met Eddie Egan next day and they had split immediately. They salvaged what they could from the wreck of Tim Rucker's organization and set up in rivalry. The rift grew and their beer precincts were sharply defined. There had been warfare and at times it had been bloody, for Maxie and Eddie hated.

Maxie, too, operated a stolen car ring, and he made a business of payrolls. Eddie had not, as yet, gone into that. And he was not getting ahead as fast as Maxie. But he was getting, which was more important, Maxie's goat, through his scorn for Maxie's new operation and his contempt for Maxie's play for Jane Rucker.

Amos did not know all the details of this state of gang affairs, but he knew the

principal facts. And he became more and more amused and excited as he approached the police station. When he arrived, he parked his car and went into the reporters' room, where the other members of the press began their nightly assault on his sensibilities. But he only smiled. The day, the pride in his car and his recent experience had made him feel superior, and he went quietly to work.

He made a circuit of the gloomy police station and then stopped in the information bureau, the clearing house for all police business, where he chatted with the sergeant in charge. From there he returned to the reporter's room, and at ten o'clock he went out to lunch. During his meal he thought of his afternoon's experience and its possibilities, and when he rose to go he was breathless. Amos was highly imaginative.

He left the restaurant and decided, as he had half an hour, to take a drive. He hurried a little, as he retraced his steps to the station and he thought, alternately, of the afternoon and his car. He rounded the corner and started down the street on which the station fronted. And then he stopped dead in his tracks and gasped, as he looked ahead.

His Packard was gone.

For a moment it was unbelievable. He stood, while a score of explanations for its absence shot through his mind. And then, when the peculiar and devastating urge that follows shock flooded over him, he ran furiously to the spot where he had parked his car. Foolishly he stared and, his head clearing momentarily in his excitement, he felt a little silly. He ran to the end of the building to see if it were parked on a side street, and when he did not find it, completed a circuit of the building until he came to the driveway through which passed the patrol cars and vehicles used by the cruising squadrons of police that patrolled the city.

But the Packard was not there, either.

Amos's hazel eyes blazed then. He rushed up the steps and into the police station, bound for the inspector's office, but his sense of humor stopped him. He had meant, in his rage, to denounce the inspector and the entire police system; but after all his car had been stolen from in front of the very headquarters of the police system, and Amos was the type of person who, even in his present extremity, would recognize the possibilities of that situation. And he did. Besides, he did not want to tell the police. They had joined the reporters in scoffing mightily at Amos's ownership. Perhaps—

Just then he thought of Eddie Egan, and of Eddie's last words that afternoon. He turned to go to a nearby phone booth, but as he passed the door leading to the information bureau, he slowed involuntarily.

A moment earlier the phone in the bureau had rung. The sergeant in charge had answered it and now was in conversarion. The ringing of the phone, vague as it was, had touched Amos's reportorial instinct.

"What? . . . Where? . . . When? . . . How many? . . ."

The cardinal questions which a news story lead must answer caused Amos to pause, a glimmer of idle curiosity piercing the fog of his excitement, but with the next words of the sergeant he wheeled and burst into the bureau room.

"Maxie Greenberg! . . . Egan! . . ."

Amos was at the bureau desk. The sergeant listened to the rest of the report, punctuating it by terse questions, and hung up.

"What—" began Amos, but the sergeant already was on the phone again.

He talked rapidly, as the detective bureau, the inspector's office, the various precinct stations scattered over the city were switched on his wire.

"Yeah!" The sergeant was excited.

Amos listened, his car, for the time being, forgotten.

"Maxie Greenberg. 55th and Kinsman. Two trucks—beer. Maxie's mob. . . . Egan's mob. . . . Egan's territory. Spike Donovan. Tony Cazzi. Talked to Maxie. . . . Shot down. Egan mob too late. Maxie's mob got away." And more.

AMOS waited. The flying squadron of central station, a group of five men, already was leaving. The siren of its car whined shrilly as it left the station garage and swung into the street, bound uptown. The piercing note of the siren sent a shiver through Amos. It also caused him to think of his car. And then he grew rigid. A hunch, nebulous and vague before, suddenly flashed before his whirling mind like a bolt of striking lightning.

"Was Maxie with 'em?" he asked the sergeant, who had finished telephoning.

"Don't know." The sergeant was engrossed in making his report.

"Was there a red Packard with 'em?"

The sergeant looked up.

"How the hell do I know? You heard what I said." He went on making his report.

Amos waited no longer. He ran into the reporters' room. He called his office. Briefly he told his story over the phone, and he told it so well that the garrulous city editor forgot to ask his usual superfluous questions and neglected to assign an older man to the story. He sent a Cole-8, one of the cars maintained by the *Globe* for such emergencies, for Amos. Amos met it on the corner and jumped in. The car sped toward the scene of the fight.

When he arrived there was little to be found at that point. The story had moved. The sergeant had told him substantially all he wanted to know, anyway, so he simply made a hurried examination. Loiterers, curious and morbid, stood about, looking at an ominous wine colored spot on the asphalt. Foreign women wrung their hands and talked excitedly. There was much laughter. Amos got two eye witness stories and went on.

He went to Columbus Hospital. He arrived there and found it in silent confusion. Its dimly lighted corridors were full of policemen and hard eyed men who shuffled around among the nurses, waiting for something. Every one, even the cops, had his hat off. Tenseness brooded over the dark halls like a sullen fog. But all was silent save for a murmur that was a dull hum. Here was sanctuary. There was drama here, and it was greater than law and crime. It respected neither; but they both respected it. And Amos, as always, felt as if he were in a cathedral.

His reporter's badge admitted him to the operating room. It smelled of disinfectants and antiseptics and death.

He was relieved to know that he was the first newspaperman on hand, but his heart positively leaped when he saw Eddie Egan.

Tony Cazzi would never talk again; but Spike Donovan, his Irish face ashen, his breath labored, was talking to a captain of detectives, whom Amos recognized as the man who had won the pistol shot contest at the last police picnic. Across from the captain sat Eddie, looking without expression at the face of his dying friend.

Spike finished his story. He relaxed on the stiff bed and wrinkled his Irish face into a smile as Eddie lighted a cigaret for him.

"Well—" said the captain of detectives.

Spike Donovan did not move; he did not even turn his head. He only looked at Eddie Egan. With a trembling and flushed hand that looked as if it were about to burst with his pounding blood, he raised the cigaret to his lips and drew. He even inhaled, deeply.

"You ain't goin' to be sensible?" said the captain of detectives.

"Eddie," said Spike Donovan, "when you see Millie, tell her the key to the car's in the bureau drawer."

Spike Donovan died.

"God!" said Eddie Egan.

"Guts!" said a doctor.

The captain of detectives sighed.

"Guts," he said, "but dumb—Lord, how dumb!"

Eddie did not look up, but the sheet he held in his freckled hands tore a little.

Amos watched. The captain of detectives rose. With a gesture of helpless resignation he shrugged and started to leave the room. Amos stopped him. The

captain recognized him and brightened.

"Well—" began the captain of detectives to Amos, and told what he knew of the story. He used his own name a great deal, and wanted to be identified as the best pistol shot on the police force.

Amos phoned the story of how Maxie Greenberg's men had invaded Eddie Egan's territory with two truckloads of beer; how Eddie had sent Spike Donovan and Tony Cazzi to meet them, not, obviously, with violent intent—there were only two of them and there were twelve of the others—but simply to talk it over. (Eddie still respected Tim Rucker's tranquil rule.) The "talking over" was of course a warning—or was meant to be, for those to whom Spike Donovan and Tony Cazzi had talked, heard but a few words. Then they silenced them forever as far as they were concerned. And, with the speed of gangland operations, they had escaped with their beer and their murder.

All of this Spike Donovan had told the captain of detectives before the arrival of Amos; all of this, but no names. Nobody knew, nobody could admit anything as legal evidence in a case against Maxie Greenberg and his men, although every one interested knew well enough that it had been they. And nobody knew who had held the revolver or revolvers that had sprayed death into Spike Donovan and Tony Cazzi. Nobody, Amos knew, except one man, and he still sat by the dead Spike, the sheet between his freckled hands torn a little more.

All of this the rewrite man in the city room of the *Globe* heard and then Amos went back into the operating room.

HE WAITED. Eddie still sat, his sandy head bowed. Eddie had liked Spike. He acted as if he had, anyway. But the rest of those in the operating room—after all, it was a bunch of thugs—looked a little cynical and departed. All but Amos.

He stood, now by the door, and watched. He did not look cynical and he said nothing. He stood for perhaps five minutes; then he lighted a cigaret. As the match flamed Eddie relaxed his grip on the sheet and looked up. Some of the steel began to leave his eyes and the savagery began to fade from his face when he saw Amos. His vulpine features even twisted into a little smile.

"Hello, boy," said Eddie. "You on this?"

"Yeah."

"I'm glad of that."

Eddie looked back at Spike. He grew rigid for a moment and then relaxed. He sighed.

"Well—" he said, and got up. He pulled the sheet back over Spike Donovan's face. Amos inhaled deeply.

"Tough," said Eddie. "He never had a— Where you goin' now, boy?"

"Nowhere."

"Want to come with me? I want company. My boys've gone; I wouldn't want to see 'em anyway—now."

Amos nodded.

"I have to phone," he said.

"O.K," said Eddie. "I'm parked just around the corner."

Amos phoned. He said he would not be back, that he was going after more story, but he did not say where or with whom. The editor did not like that, and said so, but he overlooked it. Amos had, he also said, done a good job. And the city editor was, he also admitted, all for letting a man break his own paths so long as it did not interfere with the paper's business. It was quite a speech. When it was over, Amos went outside. He dismissed the Cole-8 and went around the corner. Eddie was waiting. Amos said nothing and got in the car. Eddie said nothing either and they started off.

They drove and drove. Each remained silent. Amos again was waiting. And it was not the time to speak of stolen cars, anyway.

They drove through Gordon Park and stopped on a little knoll that overlooked Lake Erie. The soft rustle of easy surf reached them.

"Spike Donovan—" that was Eddie— "Maxie Greenberg, that rat—I wish I'd

let you beat hell out o' him today. But he'd just have leaded you too. Listen—"

He turned abruptly to Amos, a savage look in his eyes.

"I gotta talk to somebody; Spike was my best friend . . . I can't talk to my boys—now. Couldn't hold 'em if I did. So I'm talkin' to you—God knows why."

He paused and lighted a cigaret. Amos waited. The surf rustled quietly. Eddie inhaled deeply and then turned again to Amos.

"Maxie Greenberg," he went on slowly, "got Spike an' Tony. He shot 'em himself. They never had a chance, Spike told me."

Amos waited again, while Eddie, his eyes staring ahead in the glow of the dashlight, remained motionless.

"But," continued Eddie, "I ain't goin' after him now. I'll bust him, though, and get him right—some day. I'll bust him and his whole rotten mob wide open. There's a frail workin' in his nightclub an' I'm workin' on her. She's sweet on him an' one o' his guys is sweet on her. She'll learn something some day. And when she does— Right now, I guess, he's with Jane Rucker dancin'—dancin' while Tony and Spike're just a coupla cold stiffs."

Amos turned to Eddie.

"Do you suppose Jane knows about this?"

"Not yet."

"Where, do you think, are they dancing?"

"I suppose," said Eddie, "at the Club Madrid. He owns it. Know the joint?"

"Yeh—speakeasy."

"That's right."

Eddie turned and looked at the lake. It twinkled under the night sky, and the cool, refreshing breeze still swept inland across its surface. He sighed. Then he turned back to Amos.

"You've heard more from me, boy, than anybody in years. But I like you. And—" he paused as he searched Amos's face— "Jane likes you," he finished slowly. "Maybe you—" he started again— "Aw, hell! An' you got that dirty kike's goat today, an' I like that."

Eddie looked back at the dark lake.

"My car," said Amos, irrelevantly, "was stolen tonight."

"The hell!" Eddie turned abruptly again. "Well, I guess you know who glommed it."

"I guess I do," said Amos, and realized that, as far as Eddie and his car were concerned, he had waited in vain. But, he also realized, what could Eddie do about it anyway?

Eddie stepped on the starter. He swung the car around and drove back toward town along the curved boulevard running through the park. Amos was thinking rapidly.

"Eddie," he said, "if you're not too busy, would you mind driving me to the Club Madrid?"

Eddie looked at Amos out of the corner of his eye. He shrugged. Then he smiled.

"Why sure," he said slowly, "I could do that."

THEY drove rapidly out of the park and down Euclid Avenue. Amos wondered why he was going, but he did not ask Eddie to stop. When they came to 22nd Street, Eddie pulled up at the curb. Across the avenue a sign hung over the sidewalk. On the sign in letters traced by blue and red electric lights were the words, "Club Madrid."

Amos got out. As he did, a cop walking his beat passed. When he was out of earshot, Eddie turned to Amos.

"Ain't they a laugh?" he said.

"Thanks, Eddie," Amos said. "If ever I can do anything for you, let me know. See you later."

"O.K," said Eddie; and added, "Good luck. Say, remember, if you get in a jam, to say that anything that happens to you, happens to me, too. It might help."

"Thanks, Eddie."

Eddie drove off. Amos walked across the street. Eddie's last words might have been meant to be comforting; they were, in a sense, but Amos could not help think-

ing of Spike Donovan. Nevertheless, he entered the Club Madrid.

He had been there before, he recalled, but on that occasion he was in no condition to note much. One of the boys from the police station had wound up an interesting, if rather uncertain, evening, by pouring a quart of Maxie Greenberg's, alleged rye whisky down Amos's back. Amos did not know it until next day; in fact he had not known he was at the Club Madrid—until some one told him.

He knew, however, that he could get in. Any speakeasy in The Town would honor a reporter's badge.

He was admitted to a long hall, dimly lighted, and escorted to the checkroom. He had no hat, which disappointed the check girl, and he wondered if she were the one Eddie had mentioned. A little bit farther he passed an alcove, into which he could see through a small opening in the drapes that hung before it. An amorous couple were there. They arrested his progress momentarily and he went on until he reached a heavy door at the end of the hall. This was opened and he stepped into the ballroom.

He stopped a moment to accustom his eyes to the still fainter light there and to the smoke, which hung in sluggish blue strata over the floor. The orchestra was playing in slow cadence, a moaning stomp, and a few couples danced to it. Looking over these, Amos surveyed the room. And in a corner near the orchestra he saw Jane Rucker.

She was seated at a round table, her back to the corner, and at the table were several other men and women. Those whose faces he could see he did not know, but there was no mistaking the heavy back and big head of Maxie Greenberg. He sat just opposite Jane Rucker, and was talking earnestly to a man who sat on his right. He was for the moment quite unconcerned about Jane Rucker.

She, on her part, was quite unconcerned about him. She did not talk with the others of the party. Her lovely head, uncovered now, so that the quiet flame of her hair shone in the faint light, was bowed. She was staring at the tablecloth while she toyed with a tall glass—a highball, Amos supposed. And he saw that she had discarded her green for dark blue and that it suited her as well. She had not see him yet.

He walked across the floor and took a table against the wall not far from that of Maxie Greenberg. From his seat he could watch Jane Rucker, and he knew, eventually, that she must look at him, and that she must recognize him. Maxie Greenberg could not see him without turning around.

There were two things in Amos's mind. Had he stopped, just then, to think about it, he could not have told exactly why he was in Maxie Greenberg's nightclub. But the same impulsiveness that had caused him to follow the green touring car that afternoon probably would have accounted for it. The impulsiveness, and the two things on his mind. They were his Packard and Jane Rucker; or, perhaps, Jane Rucker and his Packard. They had become, for him, quite inextricably commingled.

So he fixed his gaze on Jane. A shot of Maxie's spurious rye added to the intensity of the gaze, and she became restless. She raised her glass and drank. She fidgeted about and lighted a cigaret. The music, silent between dances, suddenly struck up in passionate stridence, and she raised her glass again. She drank, and as she drank, her eyes met the fixed gaze of Amos over the rim of the glass.

She started; but she was suave. Only a slight twitch of her hand revealed her momentary perturbation. She set the glass down and looked around her table casually. Evidently satisfied, she looked back at Amos and her look held a question.

THE QUESTION was what Amos was awaiting. He could, he knew, do nothing unless it was there, for it was, in a sense, an invitation. He inclined his head in the direction of the door leading out of the ballroom. She nodded slightly

picked up her glass and drained it.

On the floor a jam of couples—it was late, now, and the more subdued night-clubs had closed—stomped and writhed through the smoky air. And Jane Rucker, after excusing herself, walked around and through them. Maxie Greenberg did not even turn his head. The man to whom he was talking did, though, and Amos saw a sleek, pale youth, younger, he knew, than himself. But the youth turned back to Maxie. Jane Rucker reached the door and went out.

Amos got up and picked his own way through the dancers. When he passed through the door, she was waiting by the drapes of the alcove in the dimly lighted hallway. When she saw him, she passed through them and entered the alcove. The amorous couple had left. Amos followed her, but as he did, he saw the check girl eyeing him curiously. He paid little attention to that, however. He pulled the drapes together behind him and looked at Jane.

She smiled, but also she was troubled. Amos also smiled.

"Hello," he said.

"Have you lost your mind?" asked Jane Rucker.

"Maybe."

"Why did you come here?"

"Why do you suppose?"

"Oh—I don't know. You know, I suppose, that it isn't exactly safe?"

"Yes, I know that—but neither was the drive this afternoon."

Jane Rucker laughed a little at that. So did Amos. He offered her a cigaret. She took it and lighted it.

"Well?" said Jane Rucker, and inhaled.

"I might ask you."

She laughed again.

"Yes," she said, "you might—but I couldn't tell you. I just liked your looks, that's all."

"That's enough, I guess," said Amos, "to start with; and I liked yours. I suppose, maybe, that's why I'm here." Amos was not thinking much about his Packard, now. "When can I really see you?"

Her green eyes showed genuine surprise then, but they also gleamed a little. Amos saw that they were warm. Then they became troubled.

"You shouldn't have asked that," she said slowly.

"Why?"

"Well, I—Maxie . . ."

"Do you belong to him?"

She pulled fiercely on her cigaret. Then she looked hard at Amos for a moment.

"Yes!" she blurted.

"Like hell! Do you want to?"

She sat down in the seat that went around the alcove, then. Amos sat down too.

"Do you?" Amos touched her arm. She remained motionless.

"Well, suppose I do. What 's it to you?"

"Plenty. I heard all about you this afternoon. I heard all about him. You don't belong to him; you know damned well you don't. And you don't. Your father didn't will you—"

She looked up, her green eyes flaming suddenly.

"Who told you so much?" she flared.

"Eddie Egan."

She let her shoulders sag a little. The cigaret fell from her hand and she slowly crushed it on the floor with a high heel. Her hands fell into her lap and lay still.

"I suppose," she began, and Amos quivered, for her voice was husky, "I don't belong to him, but—"

"But what?"

"Oh, I don't know." She raised her head and looked at Amos with searching and misty eyes. She was very close to him, now. "Maybe," she continued, "I'll tell you someti—"

Her statement was cut short, for Amos with his capacity for impulse had done a sudden and apparently unexpected thing. He had kissed her on the mouth. He held her, for his arms slid quickly around her, and then he felt her red mouth, surprised and inanimate a moment before, respond. When he released her, he looked into her green eyes a second and then he kissed her

again. And now he saw that her eyes were more intently searching than ever. Also, they were thrillingly bright. So he kissed her again and she responded with no hesitation.

ABRUPTLY, however, they broke away. The curtains of the alcove had parted ever so slightly, and they saw the skirts and figure of the check girl pass. They laughed. Neither spoke for a moment.

"I knew I would like to have you do that," she said finally.

"Well—"

"And I knew you would do it," she went on, as Amos, his power to speak hopelessly suspended, remained silent. "You looked, somehow, as if you would do it, when I saw you driving this afternoon; and I suppose you knew that you could."

"No, I didn't," said Amos, suddenly calm, "but I knew I would try."

"Yes, I suppose you would. Well—you asked when you could really see me; when are you going to take me for a ride in that sporty car of yours?"

Amos looked at her keenly. He wondered, for an instant, if she were taking him in. But the surprise in her eyes at his unexpected scrutiny allayed him. He knew then that she did not know, that she never knew, much of Maxie's activities.

"Take you for a ride?" said Amos, in an attempt to cover his confusion.

"Why, yes—for a ride."

"I," said a hard and heavy voice, "might take you both for a ride."

The curtain of the alcove flew suddenly apart and hung, swinging slowly and ominously. And Amos and Jane, their heads turned abruptly, sat as motionless as empty chairs, staring.

For framed by the curtains, his heavy hands gripping them on either side, his bulky body looming in the shaded light, stood Maxie Greenberg.

Behind him, their figures slouched too carelessly, were three of the men who had sat at his table, one of them the sleek, pale youth. And just behind the sleek, pale youth, a malicious grin twisting her mouth and her eyes glittering upon Jane, stood the check girl.

The tableau maintained, like slow seconds ticking, and no one moved. From within the ballroom came the faint and muted passion of clashing "blues." But there was something sinister, something terrible, in the quietly piercing whine of muted trumpets now. Their tones stabbed Amos and stirred him. They seemed to gnaw at his stomach, and he felt, as the motionless moments went by, as if he must scream. Also, he knew that Jane Rucker was on the verge of collapse. But he only stared. He stared so long at Maxie Greenberg standing there, in the red, shaded light, that his eyes ached.

The check girl broke it. She advanced and put her hand on Maxie's arm. He turned.

"Now!" said the check girl. "What did I tell you all along?"

Maxie did not answer her, but her question infuriated him. He turned and struck her across the face with the back of his hand. Jane Rucker gave a little scream. The check girl, knocked from in front of the alcove, did not return. Maxie turned back and again the five of them were silent and motionless.

This time it was Maxie who broke it. He took a step toward Amos. The movement released Amos's tension somewhat, but it only caused him to rise a little in an attitude of defense. He did not know what Maxie intended to do.

At his action the three men behind Maxie moved quickly to either side of their leader, and stood, their hands in their coat pockets. Amos sat down again and relaxed a little. He looked at Jane Rucker, but she only stared at Maxie Greenberg, a horrible fascination in her eyes. Maxie's scowl, directed so long at her, abruptly switched to Amos, and he grinned.

"Yeah," he said, "a nice long ride, maybe; but it ain't necessary. This'll do.

Get up, Janie, an' beat it. Your boy friend's gotta be taught somethin'."

He leered at her, but she did not move. She still sat, rigid and silent, staring at him. His leer faded suddenly and his scowl reappeared.

"Get out!" he snarled. "An' love it 'cause *you* ain't on a spot!"

But still Jane Rucker did not move. The three gunmen behind Maxie shifted nervously. The check girl cautiously peered around one of the drapes.

"Why don't you—" she began at Maxie.

He turned and struck her again. Once more she vanished. And then, his heavy face twisting, Maxie started for Jane.

As he did so, Amos found his wits. He snapped up his arm and looked at his wrist watch.

"I guess," he said, and his voice was only a little husky, "I'll have to be going."

Maxie stopped abruptly in his advance toward Jane. He wheeled to face Amos, who was standing now. The gunmen stared uncertainly at Amos and their arms, tensed a moment before, sagged a little.

"The hell—" began Maxie, and moved a step nearer Amos.

"Yeh," said Amos, "I'll have to. Eddie Egan's waiting for me."

THE THREE gunmen looked at one another and then at the door of the Club Madrid. It was shut, and its solid panels loomed reassuringly, but it could fly open suddenly and easily. Their attitudes were ones of defense against that door, now. Maxie's scowl became a little uncertain.

"Eddie E—" Maxie began again.

"Yeah, he and some of his boys dropped me here for a minute while they took a turn around the block. He wanted to see that cop just outside, too, and he was talking with him when I came in. If I'm not out by 2:30—" Amos lifted his arm and held his watch against his ear—"they're coming in. And it's two twenty-nine now. I've been with Eddie ever since Spike died, and he isn't in such a good humor. And I don't want to cause any more trouble tonight. So I'd better be going."

Amos moved toward the entrance of the alcove. The three gunmen stood rooted, their attitude still one of defense against the possible opening of the door. Amos pushed through them without a glance behind him. He was aware, however, that Jane Rucker was sobbing quietly and profoundly. The gunmen and Maxie followed him with blank, suspicious gazes. The check girl, her face bruised, peered out of her room. Amos smiled at her and flipped her a quarter. Then he moved to the door. He opened it.

"Good night," he said, and went out.

And then his deliberate movements ceased. The cop he had seen walking the beat when he had entered the Club Madrid was in sight up the street. He was making a return trip. Amos broke into a furious run in the direction of the cop. He zigzagged his steps. Also, he kept in the shadow of the trees in the parking that lined the street. He heard the door of the Club Madrid slam open, heard the rush of feet to the sidewalk and a snarl of voices.

"Hey!" he yelled at the cop.

The man started.

"What the hell!" he said.

In the quiet of the street his voice sounded hollowly and echoed. The sounds in front of the Club Madrid ceased. Amos slowed down. He reached the policeman and turned, panting.

In the colored glow beneath the electric sign that marked the Club Madrid stood Maxie Greenberg and the three gunmen. They were motionless and staring up the street to where Amos, half a block distant, stood beside the blue uniform and glinting shield of the cop. Then they turned, all except the sleek, pale youth, who remained to watch, and went back into the club. Amos turned to the cop, who regarded him suspiciously.

"What—" began the cop.

"Howdy," said Amos, displaying his reporter's badge. "Anything doin', Officer?"

"Why, no— Say, what you lammin' down the street this time o' night for?"

"Well," said Amos, and pulled a cigaret from his package, "I just had a little argument with the proprietor of that dump back there." He lighted his cigaret.

"My Lord! Gimme one o' them things." Amos passed the cop the package of cigarets. He held a match for a light. "Thanks," said the policeman. "Do you want to get full o' lead. You know who he is?"

"No," said Amos.

"Maxie Greenberg! That's who he is."

"Who's he?" asked Amos.

"Well I'll be damned," said the cop. "And you call yourself a newspaperman." He pulled on his cigaret and laughed. "I'll certainly be damned." He stopped laughing and tapped Amos on the chest with his club. "Boy," he said, "he's poison. He's the lousiest . . ."

The cop told Amos all about Maxie Greenberg, Eddie Egan and Tim Rucker.

"Why, just tonight—" went on the cop; the sleek, pale youth turned slowly and entered the Club Madrid— "Spike Donovan . . ." The cop told Amos all about the shooting at 55th and Kinsman.

Amos saw that the sleek, pale youth had vanished.

"Officer," he said, "would you mind walking up the street with me? After what you told me—"

"Why, no," said the cop, and he expanded protectively. "I'll walk up as far as 40th with you. You can get a taxi there."

They turned and walked up to 40th. At the street they swung across the thoroughfare to a taxi stand. Amos went up to the cab.

"Thanks, Officer," said Amos. "Maybe I can give you a break sometime."

"Yeah, maybe you can, boy," said the cop, and laughed. "But you'd better learn your mobs." He turned into an all-night restaurant to get a free sandwich. "Good night."

Amos got into the taxi.

"Drive," he said, with a glance back down the street, "up Euclid to 55th, turn south, and then turn west on Prospect. You can hit Euclid again at 12th. I'm goin' to the Imperial."

The driver nodded and the cab rolled off. Amos considered.

HIS POSITION, he thought dryly, was not very encouraging. He was definitely "on the spot." But he did not know what he could do about it. In fact, had he pursued the only safe course left to him, he would have left town immediately. But he was not of that type, and he also felt that, having outwitted Maxie and his men so easily once, he could do it again. And he also wanted another crack at Maxie's heavy face.

Amos, being normal, could fear, but he was of the temperament that does not fear in the abstract. Also, being normal, the melodrama growing about him did not make its full impression on him. Vaguely, he understood, it was terribly real, but because he could not imagine himself in a really fatal situation, he was going about his business with only the slight precaution of not showing up at his boarding house. It was this streak, perhaps, that had enabled him to pull his amazing coup at the Club Madrid. His nature, being what it was, simply had refused to recognize real danger. It was more like makebelieve. He possessed, although he had not been in the war, the confidence many men of the trenches possessed—a sturdy and unshakable conviction of dreamlike unreality in the face of abnormal danger.

And then, of course, there was Jane. Amos was young; he would not forget her red lips.

He decided that he would notify his editor next day. After that he did not know what he would do.

He reached the hotel and registered. And because he could not fear in the

abstract, he slept soundly. When he awoke the sun was streaming in his window and he knew the day was far advanced. His wrist watch showed him it was nearing eleven o'clock.

He got up and looked out. It was another splendid day, and he felt good. Not at all did he feel like a man who has been threatened by a notorious killer. So he bathed and dressed and after breakfast called his editor. The editor was in fine fettle.

"Oh, yes, Whipple," said the editor over the phone, "that was a fine piece of work you pulled last night; a fine piece of work."

"Thank you," said Amos.

"And if you keep up, you'll get a raise, boy. I like initiative. I've always rewarded initiative. And I'll reward yours." Amos decided that the editor had been drinking before the middle of the day. "And another thing I like about you," went on the editor, "is that you go right after a thing; and you're not too cocky. Inclined to play your hand alone, but that's all right. . . . Uh. . . . What was it you phoned about?"

"I phoned to tell you," said Amos, "that I won't be at work today."

"Why not?" The editor had lost some of his enthusiasm.

"Well, you see, in cruising around last night, I ran afoul Maxie Greenberg and Maxie didn't like it. He tried something fast, but I got out of that. However, I think I'll stick pretty close. . . . I'm at the Imperial."

"Well," said the editor. "Well—aren't the police enough protection down at the station?"

"I don't think so, right now, sir. You see, this is rather involved, and I don't think it's permanent. But I want to find out definitely, and I don't want to get shot!"

"Well," said the editor. "Well—that's a little unusual. Is it as serious as all that?"

"I believe so. I'll be at work as soon as possible. Will you please keep quiet about where I am?"

"Why, yes," said the editor.

"Except," went on Amos, "if a Miss Rucker or a Mr. Egan call. You can tell them I'm here, if you will?"

"Why, yes," said the editor, slowly, "I suppose I can do that. But try to get this settled as soon as possible."

"Oh, yes, sir," said Amos.

They both hung up.

AMOS went back to his room. It was now after one. He had bought a few books and magazines and he began to read. But he did not read very long. It suddenly occurred to him that he might, if he wanted to stay in The Town, be forced to stay in a hotel and keep out of sight indefinitely. And that was not practicable. For Amos did not possess the funds to maintain a hotel room very long; neither, he imagined, would Maxie Greenberg remain long in ignorance of where he was. He could, of course, run, but he did not want to. There was Jane Rucker; there was his car, which was a point of honor; and there was Maxie Greenberg's heavy face that he wanted to smash. Still, it might be indefinite, this situation.

He thought of Eddie Egan. But, he reflected, it would not do to call in Eddie Egan. It would relieve the situation but little and he would be definitely involved in gang war. That amused him and then enraged him. He turned savagely on the memory of his quixotic ride down the avenue the day before, and he cursed himself; next, when he thought of Jane Rucker, he felt rather proud of himself. He had, after all, succeeded in what he had set out to do on that ride, even if he was in a jam. So, alternately angry and proud, he lay and tried to read, until he had kicked the bedclothes completely out of shape.

The phone rang.

Amos bounded up from the bed and answered it. It was the switchboard operator at the *Globe*.

"Mr. Whipple," she said, "there's a man been calling for you all afternoon and

asking where you are. I got orders from the boss not to tell where you were unless it was to those two people you mentioned, and this gent wouldn't tell me. I didn't know whether it was Mr. Egan or not, so I didn't tell him."

"Atta girl," said Amos.

"But the last time he called he got sore. He says, 'Tell him, if you talk to him, that Maxie Greenberg's lookin' for him and will find him.' Do you know a Mr. Greenberg, Mr. Whipple?"

"Why yes—slightly," said Amos. "Did he say anything else?"

"No."

"Well, if he calls again, don't tell him where I am, will you?"

"Oh, no, sir," said the phone girl, and then went on, "There was a girl called—"

But Amos heard no more. They were cut off. He jiggled the hook violently and then gave it up. He peered out the window. The girl would probably call back. He mused, as he peered out the window. He was, he reflected, in pretty deep. And then he froze to the floor.

Some one was knocking on his door.

Amos's imagination pictured the heavy form of Maxie Greenberg backed with the three gunmen of the night before standing just outside in the hall. If it were . . .

He darted to the window on tiptoe and looked out. He was not close enough to the fire escape. He thought of the phone, but dismissed that. They might shoot through the wall. It was next the door anyway. And then he solved it—he would make no answer at all. They might stay, but he'd make no noise. They would, probably, if they thought he had gone out, wait for him; but something, meanwhile, might turn up. So he waited.

The knocking was repeated. Amos remained silent, but he heard something else then. He rushed to the door and opened it.

Jane Rucker stood there.

"What did you say?" said Amos, and pulled her inside. He kissed her.

"I was about to say," said Jane Rucker, "that I was Jane Rucker and for you to let me in before the floor clerk threw me out." She laughed. "They think a lot of your virtue in this hotel. That clerk looked as if she were going to follow me; maybe she did."

Amos went inanely to the door and looked out. The floor clerk had not followed her. Jane Rucker laughed again. She lighted a cigaret and sat down in one of the upholstered chairs. She regarded Amos a moment and blew a double stream of smoke from her nostrils. Then her smile faded. He pulled up a straight chair and sat down facing her. His eyes searched hers restlessly.

"Why—" he began.

"I've only a minute. I called the *Globe* and they told me you were here. Maxie's downtown and brought me—"

Amos was savage.

"Did he do anything to you last night?"

"No, but he's going to do something tonight. No, not hurt me; he's going to make me do something. Oh, you've got to leave town!"

"Why?"

"Why?" She was incredulous. "You know perfectly well why. You were so lucky last night, I don't believe it yet. You're a rather keen young man, Amos Whipple, but you won't work that again and you won't be lucky next time. He'll get you."

She crushed out her cigaret in an ash tray and sat up. She took his hands in hers and looked at him anxiously. Her eyes were nervous.

"Please . . ."

Her voice was husky and Amos stirred. He thrilled to her concern and his pulses pounded. Then his capacity for impulse asserted itself.

"I'll go," he said, "if you go too."

SHE LOOKED at him blankly for a moment; then her eyes flashed joyously, and Amos thought for a moment that she would accept. She made as if to embrace him, but suddenly she stiffened and then as suddenly sat back in the chair.

Her body sagged and Amos saw that she was sobbing. It maddened him.

"Don't," he whispered. "Don't." Then, "What," he said harshly, "hold has he got on you?"

She did not answer him.

"Tell me!" he snarled.

But she only shook her head. Amos stood watching her for a moment; then he slowly turned away.

"Oh, my—" he began, and went no further. His voice was a whisper and heavy. Again he was silent.

"I can't" she said finally, and Amos whirled to face her again. "Maybe sometime—"

She looked up at him with reddened eyes. She took out her vanity case and began to fix her face.

Amos sat down on the bed. He beat his fist slowly against the palm of his other hand.

"I wish—" he began again, but she rose from the chair and faced him.

"Please," she said. "Not now. Sometime, maybe. I've got to go. You'll—"

But Amos had risen now and caught her in his arms. After a moment, however, she pulled away.

"Please," she said. "I've got to go. And you'll go too, won't you?" She stood in the doorway now, her hand on the knob.

"No," said Amos, "I won't go. I'll get that kike! I'll—"

"Oh, my God!" said Jane Rucker. "You—why—why, he's got your car now. He drove me downtown in it. He'll get you, next. Oh, please—please go."

Amos looked blank at that. His hunch had told him as much, but his car had been far from his thoughts just then. He was speechless. Jane Rucker mistook his speechlessness.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't know it last night. Honestly I didn't. You must believe that."

She looked at her wrist watch absently. She started.

"Oh," she went on, "I must go." She paused and looked pleadingly at Amos. "Please believe me, and please go . . ."

But Amos was still staring. She turned away, a helpless gesture in her whole body.

"Goodby," she said, and was gone.

Amos snapped out of it then. He rushed to the door and after her down the hallway. She was turning into the main hall that led past the elevators when he caught up with her. He bounded around the corner and caught her by the arm.

"Jane," he said, "I'm sorry. Things are coming too fast, I guess. I know you didn't know last night, when you asked me to take you riding. You must believe that, too. But—" Amos' young face was harder than it ever had been before— "I'm not leaving town until you do and until that lousy kike's busted, and busted right!"

"Oh—" she began, and stopped. The floor clerk, a grim visaged woman, had seen Amos dash around the corner and was approaching them. "I'll try to phone you tonight," she whispered, and started away.

Amos let her go. She walked down the hall past the floor clerk, who watched her suspiciously. When Jane had passed she turned her suspicion on Amos, but Amos was only vaguely aware of her. He was watching Jane Rucker.

Then he turned abruptly. A phone was ringing, and he knew it was in his room. He hurried back and answered it.

"Hello, boy," said a familiar voice. "This is Eddie Egan."

"Oh, hello, Eddie."

"How's tricks?" And before Amos could answer, "What the hell you doin' at the hotel? I damn' near had to give my life history before I could get you. They ask my name; they talk it over; then they ask my name again; then they talk it over again; then they finally tell me you're at the hotel. Do you live there?"

"Since last night."

"Oh," said Eddie, "I begin to see. What happened at the Madrid last night?"

Amos told him.

"And," he said in conclusion, "that

lousy kike's got my car. I know it for sure."

"How do you know that?"

"Well," said Amos, "Jane was just here and told me."

"Oh," said Eddie. Amos had not told all of the happenings of the night before. "She was?"

Eddie paused as he seemed to consider that. The pause grew painful. Amos heard Eddie sigh.

"Well," Eddie went on suddenly, "maybe I can tell you somethin' that'll finish this business right off."

"What?"

"Well," said Eddie, "you got to handle this like a pro, or it ain't worth much. And you got to play the cops right or they'll spill it all. Maxie's cagey, you know, if he is dumb; but you can get him this time and get him right; and you know that'd be right sweet for me, too. Listen:

"Maxie an' his mob are goin' to stick up the State Theater, tonight. How do I know? Well, I told you last night about that gal; she finally got her fill." Amos thought of those two blows Maxie had struck the check girl. "At ten o'clock Maxie and his mob go up to the entrance. . . . Cars out front, runnin' and waitin'. . . . They're goin' inside. . . . When the band plays the big number the State closes its doors. . . . Nobody in; nobody out. . . . Second show on . . . Nobody comin' in much anyway. . . . Nobody comin' out. . . . Maxie an' his boys buy tickets. . . . Just before the big number they go out. . . . The cash girl's just puttin' the receipts in the box for the cashier. . . . Nobody much around. . . . Maxie jumps in his car an' lams. . . . Now, think you can do anything about that?"

"I think," said Amos, and his voice was surprisingly steady, "I might. Does Jane know anything about this?"

"No," said Eddie, and his voice was not so steady, "she doesn't—yet. But she will. Maxie's usin' her as a blind. She'll be waitin' in one o' the cars out front. An' then Maxie plans to beat it an' take her."

"I know," said Amos, "I can do something about it."

"O.K, but handle it right. An' good luck, boy. I want to get Maxie, but there's somethin' else I want to happen more than that. I guess you know, by now, what that is."

"I guess I do, Eddie."

They hung up. Amos turned slowly from the phone and looked a long time at the floor. He had a lump in his throat. And then he began to think of what he had to do. His mind, full of plans and information, danced and whirled. He looked at his watch and saw that it was nearly six. Four hours to go; and he had to play this right.

FOUR hours, and he knew they would be tedious. He went downstairs. In the dining room he dragged out an hour while he had his dinner and tried to listen to really good music played by an orchestra hidden somewhere in a copse of artificial palms. Then he went back to his room and tried to read. That was silly, though, and he knew it. He could not read, and several times he started to the phone; but each time he checked himself—he had to play this right.

Why, he wondered, was Maxie getting out before attending to him? And then he knew the answer. He, Amos, could wait; Maxie meant to attend to the more immediate business; and the immediate business was Jane. Amos swore.

Outside, the long evening settled into night, and The Town glittered. Far away, through his window, Amos could see the lake. A ship moved slowly past, its motion barely perceptible—like, Amos thought, time itself.

Two and one half hours passed. Amos went to the phone. He called the captain of detectives who had been at the hospital the night before.

"Hello," said Amos. "This is Whipple, of the *Globe*."

"Who?"

"Whipple, of the *Globe;* I was with you at the hospital last night."

"Oh, yes. That was a good story you had, Whipple. Now, you can say we are extending ourselves in this case. We've got every available man working on it—" The captain, something like Amos' city editor, made a little speech.

"Can you come up to Room 1203 at the Imperial, right away, Captain?"

"What?"

Amos repeated himself.

"What for?"

"I'd rather talk it over with you here."

"Well, what's it about?"

"Listen!" Amos's tone was sharp. "I can't talk very well over the phone. If you started talkin' at that end, somebody'd hear and I don't want any newspapermen on this but me, see? But I can tell you this much and you can take it or leave it: it's about Maxie Greenberg—and *it's a hot tip!*"

The captain said nothing for a moment.

"I'll come," he said finally.

Amos called his office, then. He told them to make ready.

When the captain arrived, it was nine. And he was still incredulous.

"Well," he said, "what's all the shootin' for?" He was surly. "I ain't got too long," he went on. "I'm a busy man. We've got every available man on that murder, you know."

"Haven't you a few harness men lying around loose?" asked Amos. "They can't all be out. Maxie Greenberg's going to pull a job tonight, and you might do something about it."

"Oh, yeah?" said the captain. "How do you know?"

"Grudge tip."

The captain was not certain yet, but he was willing to listen.

"Well?" he said.

Amos told him what Eddie had said over the phone, and he told it clearly and rapidly. The captain's face lost its look of disbelief. His expression became keen. Amos finished his recital.

"How do you know all that?" asked the captain.

"Grudge tip," Amos said briefly.

"Whose?"

Amos said nothing for a moment. He only looked steadily at the captain, who eyed him in return.

"Is that necessary?" asked Amos, and looked at his watch. "It's 9:30."

The captain said nothing for a moment. Then:

"No, it ain't necessary. And it *is* 9:30, ain't it?"

He strode to the phone. His movement was quick and decisive, and Amos thrilled.

The captain was talking. He was talking to the night inspector.

"One squad," said the captain, "and send four plainclothesmen for me. . . . Right away," he finished, "at the State. . . . The back way."

He hung up.

"Come on," he said to Amos.

They went downstairs and began walking up the avenue toward the theater. It was only three blocks away, but when they arrived, the police contingent ordered by the captain already was on hand. They were backstage.

"Now—" began the captain. He gave the men orders. "You—" he singled out a tall, lanky patrolman— "get into that outfit there."

The cop walked over and picked up a long, black rector's coat. He removed his tunic and put it on. He shifted his holster into a side pocket of his trousers. Then he put on the flat black hat that was part of the costume. It had been used the week before in vaudeville.

The cop struck a pose. His colleagues and the stage hands laughed.

"How about the pants?" asked Amos.

"It'll be dark inside," said the captain. "They won't see. When they come in," he went on, addressing the cop, "you keep an eye on 'em. And when they start out, you follow 'em. The rest of you," he continued, addressing the four remaining men in uniform and the four detectives, "come along. And you, too, if you want to," he finished, nodding to Amos.

Amos did want to.

THEY went out through the audience, a silent field of heads shimmering in the reflection of the picture on the screen, along a side aisle. The picture was about over and the interest of the audience was at high point. They did not notice the silent procession up the side aisle.

In the lobby, an immense affair, the auto show that Amos had been urged to enter by Eddie, stood in shining array. On either side, flanked by potted palms and signs, stood the latest and most beautiful creations of the better makes of automobiles. And into these automobiles the captain of detectives ordered his men. They took their places—one in each car—quickly and silently. The people in the lobby were few and only mildly interested. They saw four policemen in uniform scatter among the automobiles, examining the cars casually, and enter them. They noticed, too, perhaps, that six other men in civilian clothes took places in the automobiles, but that was not unusual. And if they looked back they saw nothing, for the ten men had vanished. They did not know, however, that the ten men were crouched in the tonneaux of the cars.

Amos and the captain were in the tonneau of the first car to the right, just a little behind the box office in which the ticket seller, a girl, was beginning to check up her receipts. From where they crouched, they could, by raising their heads a bit, see the street, now teeming with strolling crowds who stopped, now and then, to look at the colored posters of the picture inside. The captain of detectives opened the door of the car slightly and peered through the crack; he was watching the curb.

Amos, his body tingling and perspiring, looked anywhere: up above, at the immense mural paintings on the walls of the lobby—five of them—garish and lurid, which represented the dramas of the continents. Opposite him was what the artist considered an allegory in paint of the drama of Africa. It had to do with a likeness of Cleopatra, a view of the Nile, and a stage on which grotesquely garbed players were cavorting. It was horribly overdone, but something in its vivid color shining now in the glittering brilliance of the lobby chandeliers stirred him; it lent a weird, barbaric touch to the scene.

It caused him to grow tense; it made him peer furtively and gravely about, as if he were some ancient warrior in ambush.

The lobby was slowly emptying. He looked at his watch; it was five minutes after ten. The symphonic rendition, described by Eddie Egan as the big number, was due in five minutes. Eddie had been right about that; some one had inquired backstage, and Eddie had been right about the rest of it, too. For Amos, pulling his eyes from the gaudy scene on the wall opposite him, glanced out at the street and saw a car pull up. No; two cars.

The first was his; the second was Maxie Greenberg's touring car.

In his red roadster were Maxie and Jane. They were in the front seat. In the rumble seat were two men, one the sleek, pale youth who had watched before the Club Madrid the night before, and another man, also one of those who had threatened Amos at the club. In the green car were four men, none of whom Amos had ever seen.

He looked at Jane. She stared into the lobby and there was fear in her eyes. She looked as if she might have been peering into some sinister cavern in which fantastic horror lay hidden, instead of into the blazing, tinselly lobby of the State Theater. Maxie spoke to her and Amos ground his teeth, for she drew away from him. Amos saw, also, that there was pleading in her eyes, and that further enraged him. And he saw Maxie snarl at her as she submitted to whatever he demanded. He started and made as if to get out of the car in which he crouched, but felt a restraining hand on his arm. It was the captain of detectives.

"Stay put," said the captain. "You'll mess the works."

Amos quieted.

Maxie got out. So did the sleek, pale

youth. The other man in the rumble seat got out and entered the front seat. He took the wheel. One man stayed at the wheel of the green touring car. The other three joined Maxie and the sleek, pale youth.

Five of them; and they bought tickets. The girl in the box-office shot the tickets out of the slot in the counter before her and Amos heard the clatter of change as it slid down the little chute to the hands of Maxie. The five men walked up the lobby, through the casual groups of people, and vanished within the theater.

Outside the cars stood, their engines running. Jane Rucker sat rigid in Amos' Packard, and he wondered what she was thinking about.

And then his mind switched abruptly to other things. He could hear the orchestra tuning up, the fiddles grinding their strangely beautiful discords in a meaningless jumble of sound, and mingling with the subdued and experimental blasts of the wood-winds and brasses.

A few people came in and bought tickets. They walked on back and were shown to the lounge by uniformed ushers. The symphony was about to begin. Nobody going in; nobody going out.

THE SYMPHONY began. And Amos, his eyes for some reason riveted on the mural depicting the drama of Africa, trembled. It was the overture to "Aïda." It began with the low, seductive moan of the wood-winds, the conversation between Ramphis and Radames. And Amos, his eyes still glued on the garish painting, felt barbaric. His heart was a pounding war drum; the blood singing in his ears, the long reverberation of an alarm gong. He was no longer Amos Whipple; he was some one out of the ages, and Jane Rucker . . .

The movement of the overture changed. The strings mounted. They soared into the crescendo of "Celeste Aïda," and were joined by the brasses and deeper winds. The organ thundered in a chaos of Oriental grandeur. And Amos rode the crest of the magnificent melody. He rode triumphantly. And then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw the door leading into the theater, open. He switched his gaze from the painting and saw Maxie Greenberg emerge. The music thundered out of the open door and then was subdued again as the door closed.

The usher argued with Maxie, but was brushed aside. And Maxie, as the "Celeste" ended and the staccato rhetoric between Amneris and Aïda began, moved rapidly down the lobby, followed by his men, past the still casual groups of people, who talked quietly, waiting for the music to end. In the box-office the cashier had joined the ticket seller, and Amos saw that there were stacks of coin and sheafs of bills. And then he saw, too, that the ministerially garbed cop, like a gaunt specter, was following Maxie and his men.

The procession moved on. The music within passed the temple scene and began the triumphal march. And Maxie, in the lead, approached the box-office. As he drew nearer and prepared to confront the cashier and ticket seller, the sleek, pale youth, who brought up the rear, turned, suddenly sensing the cop's presence.

The youth looked hard at the flat hat, the long coat, and then his eyes bulged. He saw the blue trousers . . .

"Jees!" It was a yell. "Maxie!"

"Put 'em up!" The cop's deep voice reached Amos.

Maxie turned. The others of his mob turned. The cops rose from their cars. And for a second it was a tableau: the police, the gang, the customers, the overture, the bright lobby, the garish murals.

But it broke; the policeman's gun had become tangled in the long coat. The sleek youth, who had not yet seen the men in the cars, jammed an automatic into the disguised man's stomach.

"Now, you—"

What else he said was, for Amos, drowned in music and excitement. For the captain of detectives, who, Amos suddenly remembered, was the best pistol shot on the police force, rose sud-

denly. His movement was quick, sure. The revolver came up; there was a moment's aim; there was a roar, an echoing roar that filled the lobby, and the sleek, pale youth dropped his automatic and grabbed a bloody and mangled hand. The cop, who had his gun loose by now, hit him across the head with the barrel. The youth dropped, as the lobby became a screaming confusion, split by the barking thunder of pistol shots.

The casual groups vanished behind the cars. The cars, having sprouted firing men, became dented and scratched. The gaudy murals cracked as ricochetting bullets smashed a painted face or leg.

Below, a policeman fell, coughing, as Maxie shot him in the stomach. The sleek youth was down already; now another gangster, his head splintered, fell into a potted palm. The captain of detectives aimed at Maxie, but the gang chief dodged behind the box-office and winged a plainclothesman.

The drivers of the two cars outside had entered. They fired; but, seeing the odds, they turned to run across the now deserted sidewalk. And then they fell forward, as if they had been tripped by an invisible wire, sprawling into the brilliant light of the *porte-cochère*, as the captain of detectives shot them through their spines. The captain of detectives, about to get out of the car in which he and Amos had hidden, jerked queerly and fell back into Amos's arms. Maxie had hit him in the shoulder.

Looking up, Amos saw Maxie leer at him. The gangster's face was livid and triumphant. He raised his automatic. Amos started to dodge, but realized he was too late. He tautened and closed his eyes, as, in imagination, he felt the awful impact of a slug. But it did not come.

He opened his eyes and saw Maxie, cursing horribly, throw his gun at the cashier who had just emerged from the box-office, and run for the street. The gun, Amos realized, had emptied itself. And, realizing that, he started for Maxie just as the cops, their work completed in the motionless forms that dotted the floor of the lobby, also began the chase.

Amos threw the inert captain of detectives back into the car and raced for the street. He reached the sidewalk ahead of the police. Maxie was in his roadster; it was moving; and the cops would have shot—but they could not.

Amos was in the way. He had reached the moving car. He saw that Jane Rucker was struggling, and he saw Maxie grab her by the throat with his right hand and hold her as he crawled away in low. And then Amos, scarring his bright red roadster with flying heels, vaulted over the back, over the open rumble seat, and dived upon Maxie.

HE LIGHTED squarely on the gang chief, but the impact carried him on and he plunged to the street as his car, now completely out of control, hurtled over the curbing and stopped.

He did not know why it had stopped, but he was on his feet. He was pulling Maxie Greenberg from his red roadster. He was fighting Maxie Greenberg. He was holding Maxie Greenberg against the running board with one hand and battering away with the other fist. His long arms and broad shoulders behind that fist drove it against the gross face beneath him and split the loose lips against broken teeth; crushed the heavy nose; closed and cut the hard eyes. He battered until he was aware that the man he held was limp.

Maxie Greenberg, his face hideous, slid to the street and lay there.

"Well—"

Amos, panting, looked up. It was the disguised cop, and he still wore his ministerial coat and flat black hat. Amos, staring vacantly, almost reeling, felt a sudden, ridiculous urge to pray.

"Well," said the cop again, "you didn't like that guy much, did you?"

"No," said Amos, "I guess I didn't."

He flung sweat from his forehead with a bruised hand. He saw, suddenly, that a crowd of people were gaping at him. And glancing up, he saw that Jane Rucker was looking at him. He smiled.

"You stopped the car," he said, remembering, strangely, that it had been stopped.

She nodded.

"Yes," she said. "I threw the switch."

He smiled again, and this time she smiled a little in return and relaxed in her seat.

Amos looked fondly at his red roadster. He frowned a little, for it had been scuffed a lot, but he smiled more than he frowned. He got in and backed it off the curb to the street and she stayed in the seat beside him.

Then he got out.

"Excuse me," he said, "I have to phone."

She nodded, and Amos went back into the lobby of the State. It was filled with curious people now. He found that the captain of detectives was painfully, but not seriously, hurt; and he found out about the rest of the casualties. Then he phoned his office. It had been waiting impatiently, with large type heads already set for every possible outcome of the affair. And Amos, the photograph of events vividly impressed on his brain, told a comprehensive story.

When he had finished, the editor, who had been listening in on an extension while Amos told his story to a rewrite man, cut in.

"Whipple," he said, "that's a swell piece of work. We've beat every other sheet in town. I congratulate you. I like initiative; I reward—"

Amos pulled down the hook quietly, hung the receiver on it and moved to another booth. He called another number.

"Hello!"

"Hello . . . Eddie?"

"Yeah."

"This is Whipple. It's—finished."

"Right?"

"Right."

"Good. Can you come out and have a snort with me on it?"

"No, I can't, Eddie; thanks . . . I got a date."

"Oh, a date . . ." Eddie hesitated. "Jane?"

"Yeah."

"Well—" Eddie's voice seemed far away— "give her my love, will you?"

"I'll do that," said Amos.

"An' gimme a ring sometime," said Eddie. "I can get you some swell stuff."

"Thanks, Eddie. I will."

They hung up. Amos walked out to the sidewalk again. The ambulance had come. He skirted the crowd and walked to his car.

"Eddie sent you his love," he said to Jane Rucker.

"Eddie—" Her eyes filled. "Where are we going?"

"I'm going to take you for a ride."

They rolled off. They drove and drove. Then they parked down by the lake where Amos and Eddie had parked and where the rustle of easy surf reached them.

"Eddie." Jane Rucker murmured it.

"He loves you, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

They were silent for awhile, looking out into the void over the lake.

"What hold—" began Amos.

"None," she cut in. "But Eddie didn't know that. Maxie thought I liked him. But I stayed for a reason."

She paused. Amos said nothing.

"I always thought he doublecrossed dad," she went on. "So I waited to find out. And I did. After last night he boasted of it and threatened me. Then he taunted me and told me about tonight. He made me come with him. And I phoned Eddie . . ."

"Then you're the girl—" began Amos again.

But he stopped. She had kissed him.

"Yes, I'm the girl," she said, when she released him. Amos kissed her again.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Following Jesse James

THE LAST of the Dalton boys—who were not so far behind the James boys—is now a popular lecturer on the side of law and order. He reminds us of the old West and its characters and how inevitable it was for a young man born under the star of outlawry, as it were, to try his hand at following Jesse James.

It was a tough trail, and few survived.

The Star of Outlawry seems to have dominated my early life. I was born fifty-nine years ago in Missouri, near Kansas City, in the old tramping grounds of the James Brothers, and as a first cousin of the Younger Boys, who were associates of the James Boys in their outlawry, I learned in my youth much of the outlaw escapades of this old organization.

I was eleven when my parents, in 1882, moved to Indian Territory, now Oklahoma, where I grew up practically with a six-shooter in my hands. In my later teens I guarded prisoners for my older brothers, who were Deputy U. S. Marshals. In those days law enforcement was often little more honorable than law infraction and when my brothers found themselves on the other side of the fence, I was with them. Our field of operation covered all the Southwestern States from the Mississippi to the Pacific. In the course of this career I came to a personal acquaintanceship with many of the most noted men of violence of that period, both bandits and officers.

Our specialty was robbery of banks and express trains. Of our different raids at least seven will have to be ranked as of the first magnitude. Among the most noted of our exploits was the robbery at Adair, Indian Territory, of the express train especially guarded by a posse of thirteen armed men—a robbery in which we procured the booty we were after and escaped without a single scratch on any one of us.

Our last encounter was a simultaneous robbery, by five of our crowd, of two banks at Coffeyville, Kansas, October 5, 1892. Following this robbery, in a pitched street battle with the citizens, eight men were killed and four wounded. Two of my brothers were killed and I was severely wounded myself, receiving eighteen buckshot and two rifle wounds. For my part in this robbery I received a life sentence in the Kansas State Penitentiary, of which I had served fourteen years and six months before being pardoned July 7, 1907.

After my release I was constantly on lecture platforms for nine years addressing millions in every state of the nation. In the course of those tours and of other more recent shorter appearances, I have made a national acquaintanceship so wide as to fall to the lot of few men. I have in my scrapbook thousands of columns of notices from newspapers the country over. —EMMETT DALTON

A Bit Pessimistic

COMRADE CUTSFORTH does a little good natured belittlin'. He likes his fiction characters to be better shots than most men; but he doesn't like his historical characters to outdo the fiction heroes. Anyway, the number of men killed by Buffalo Bill may have got mixed up with the bison count—I don't know who could set us straight on this. The following letter certainly begins to whittle down Bill Cody's score.

Would you think it immoral to drag out a couple of coals from the Camp-Fire?

I have always supposed that gun fanning, if done at all, was done by killers and other vile creatures that spent much of their time in practise with their weapons. Not belittling the efforts of yourself or Critic Rascoe, could you scarcely expect to find yourselves proficient in fanning a Colt, which if ever done, was some difficult? Isn't it quite likely that you would meet with a painful lack of success if you endeavored to do a bit of ski-jumping, or something of that sort that you were unfamiliar with? Personally, when reading a story, I like to have the principal trigger-puller to be able to do things with a six-shooter that every hombre couldn't do.

Mr. Stebbings rather gets my goat. I am afraid he has got his wires crossed rather badly in regard to his father's sidekicks. Doubtless it would be quite a shock to "Wild Bill" Cody to know that some claim he killed over a hundred men. Even Mr. Stebbings' conservative estimate of less than tenth of that amount. I don't suppose that this included Indians. Of course, Stebbings might have meant Wild Bill Hickok, but I don't think he created the impression he intended to.

—DONALD H. CUTSFORTH

The Readers' Vote

THE NEXT issue of *Adventure*—March 1st—will contain the results of the readers' vote on the stories and authors of 1929. This is not a straw vote. The editors abide by your likes and dislikes—of course remembering that new writers must have their chance. Don't forget to look for the vote in the next issue—and may all your favorites win!

Shellback

The Line went in for steam; patched sails were furled
On weather beaten yards . . . At fifty he,
Master of ships whose spars had spanned the world,
Found himself mate—his Old Man thirty-three!
"None o' your blasted ironworks for me!"
He'd snarl, and curse, as ever onward whirled
The plunging oil rank packet, noisily
Churning the seas he'd conquered. Oft he hurled
The gall that filled him at his patient chief,
Grudging, resenting with a sea sharp tongue
New ways, new manners . . . Fog wrapped, on a reef
Scarce known the steamer crashed; but as she hung
Doomed, shattered, sinking, then he ceased reviling
And faced death as a sailor meets it—smiling . . .

—HAROLD WILLARD GLEASON

Wartime Radio

THE SUGGESTION of Comrade Kruse that we use the *Ask Adventure* staff as an editorial advisory board is not a bad one. The editors have already on occasion made use of the knowledge of the *Ask Adventure* experts. However, we much prefer to refer any questionable detail back to the author for confirmation; he can usually furnish the reason for having something thus-and-so. If not, he is always willing to investigate for himself.

So we forwarded Comrade Kruse's letter to Ared White. The letter follows:

Having sat in the editorial chair, and having also spoiled much white paper, I am become skeptical of the post-publication correction of errors and therefore disinclined to argue individual points, especially in fiction, where there is no possible intent to misrepresent. It seems to me far more to the point to set up machinery which will guard against the recurrence, rather than to spank some hard worked writer for being human.

In that mood, then, there is offered the suggestion that *Adventure* might find practical a thing that was used to good advantage at my old desk, namely the submission of dubious points in stories to a group of authorities. On my old sheet this was an "Advisory Board" and for yours it need be nothing official at all since ample authority is already grouped in the "*Ask Adventure*" staff.

The working of such a scheme may be illustrated by example, and naturally I take the example from my own field. This example is not a whit worse than others which have taken place in this field in *Adventure*, for fiction authors seem utterly without the ability to use radio save in ways that are needlessly incredible and without relation to fact.

Let us suppose that Dr. Donald McNicol had been allowed to check up "The House On Rue Carnot"; we should then have been saved the rather impossible transmitter whose KEYS buzzed, which made such a row that an orchestra had to cover the uproar, and yet which seemingly operated on an unheard-of sort of etheric disturbance and without any power—for the source of the former would have been located promptly by the listening service with radio compass, and the consumption of electric power is easily and promptly checked up by the power company. Only a small, quiet set, operated for very brief intervals, would have escaped at 200 Rue Carnot—and Dr. McNicol could have told the author how to describe such a station.

—ROBERT S. KRUSE

And Ared White replied:

Your letter of November 17, 1929, to Mr. Anthony M. Rud, Editor of *Adventure*, has been necessarily referred to me for comment upon that part of the letter in which you raise the point of inaccuracy of radio equipment in the fiction house at "No. 200 Rue Carnot."

Evidently you confuse the radio of today with that of the World War period. Dr. McNicol, the expert whom you quote, doubtless would be able to tell you of the spark sets in use during the war period. Some of them even antedated the quench-gap type, and were noisy enough to be heard a hundred yards distant, or more. In fact, there were instances where the keys were placed in another room to gain "remote control", largely on account of the noise.

As for checking these from their consumption of electricity, they might have been run on juice from the Paris plant, or they might have been equipped with their own generators, as in the case of spark sets used on ships. And as for locating one promptly with listening detectors, that was not always possible during the World War period when detectors were not so highly developed as they now are. In France, during the war, the radio outfits caused much difficulty by sending messages in the clear, sometimes giving their location by map coordinates which enabled enemy artillery to open on them. But where would the radio of the spark set variety have gotten off if the system of compass detection had been highly developed at that date?

Also, the orchestra in the story was used not merely to cover up the sound of the spark-set sending station, which otherwise could have been heard for some distance, but to account for the presence of a number of men at the house, and for various other purposes, all indicated in the story, including the use of cipher concealed in the sheet music.

Summarized, the radio set in the story in question is technically correct; it could have required some means of hiding the sounds of its raucous jump-gap buzzings; it could have gotten its power from its own generators; it could have defied detection by the listening devices of that period, and it could have reached a receiving station beyond the German lines, either direct or through a relay station located outside of Paris. Your expert will confirm this, if he is familiar with the wartime spark set radio devices of a bygone period.

—ARED WHITE

The End Of The Trail

A PEKING (no old-timer can get used to calling it Peiping) mansion set on the edge of the Mohave Desert. That is the highly romantic sanctuary that Comrade Hamilton desires, now that he has been almost everywhere and seen almost everything.

My chief loss in my latest wanderlust has been the infrequency of contact with your magazine, which I have read since its first issue, and managed to buy or have sent me in twenty different countries during the past decade. But here on an island in the Celebes

Sea I must confess myself frustrated. The people who are supposed to hold magazines for me do so for a week or two, and the ones who bring me supplies two or three times a month from Zamboanga always conveniently forget to get my magazines, which are sold to others on the waiting list. So in six months I have only gotten three copies, which I went to Zambo for myself.

Your August first issue, the last one I got, has an editorial about the various ways of spelling the affirmative and negative. I have a casual acquaintance with many languages and dialects. My formal acquisition of Latin, German and Mandarin Chinese, while often a pleasure, has been of little use except occasionally.

I can think of only one language that uses the word "oh-oh" or "oh-ohm" with slurred modifications, being the Moro word for yes. I have gotten into the habit of grunting for either yes or no, and have often been made fun of when talking different languages because of the thoughtless habit. I am consciously trying to eradicate it, even as I have been compelled to speak slowly and distinctly while talking English to foreigners. This was impressed upon me in Russia in 1919-1920, where English speaking natives informed me they understood English but not American. The result has been that when I get to Europe, or England, I have trouble convincing the people I am an American. Slang and short cuts simply do not go abroad, unless they happen to be the grunts, slang and short cuts used by said natives. I have found no language that does not have them.

To my amazement I learned that Latin as taught in Central Europe from childhood has no relation to the Latin I learned. It is practically a second tongue to the well educated, and I found that they learn slang and idoms, racy tales and scandal, which when reduced to English are quite modern. I wonder whose fault it is that in American schools we are taught the highbrow stuff, grow to dislike the languages and thus fail to get the "*sprachgefuhl*" so necessary before being able to take idiomatic languages.

I have a mild acquaintance, even friendship, with a number of editors, artists, authors, playwrights and cartoonists. So I keep more or less up on current American slang. I notice a great many slang terms are only foreign words adopted by some cartoonist or writer. The word "beezer"—nose—that was current in my high school days is the Mandarin Chinese word "*pi-tzu-erh*", according to Wade's system of translation, which also means nose, pronounced *beezer!* I gained my ideas through some happy contacts with men who were in foreign trade, diplomatic service, teachers in foreign schools; and I found when ready to leave school that after my three years at college I would still have to go another three to get my A. B. degree, because I had ignored so many subjects that are prerequisites for a degree.

But I got the grounding I needed, and since that time my education has proceeded rapidly. I am fellow or member of many a learned society, yet I am the least learned of men.

Early next year I am going back to our desert ranch on the edge of the Mojave Desert and spend the rest of my days in quiet and peace, in the company of some friends who actually make money writing. This latest journey of mine, eight months on a yacht in China waters, and several months wandering around this part of the world, proves to me that the zest of my twenties and thirties is gone. I think too much of comfort and civilization to care for any more adventure. Adventure, for me, has been mostly hard work or being scared stiff, what with revolutions and battles and pirates and Intelligence work and physical labor and mental labor. I am fed up with business, at which I made a success. There are only two places in the world where I like to live, Peking, China, and our desert ranch. They both have dry, invigorating climates, and I can always build a Peking house on the ranch to get the medieval atmosphere of that regal city.

At home I will have your magazine regularly, to keep in touch with the romance of adventure, a romance one never sees until the years dim the labor and worry, or fear.—ARTHUR DE C. HAMILTON, Zamboanga, Mindanao, P. I.

A Reprint Exception

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER CREIGHTON was right. Several of Rafael Sabatini's early stories—and some of his very best—were published in book form in England, but attained no great circulation. Arthur S. Hoffman, then editor of *Adventure*, put up the question to the readers of the magazine, asking them if they would like to have these splendid stories even after a previous publication abroad. The answer was decidedly yes. Therefore "The Sea Hawk" and "Captain Blood" were published as serial novels in *Adventure*—but with everything fully explained.

As a rule *Adventure* does not reprint anything. Thank you for your letter, Mr. Kohler.

The November issue of the *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* carries an article called "On the Other Side of the Mast" by Lieutenant Commander J. M. Creighton, U. S. N., in which the following appears:

> "A fourth (sailor) was tense in the upper berth, the *Adventure Magazine* held to his eyes, while he breathlessly followed the hero in the reprint of Rafael Sabatini's *The Sea Hawk*, oblivious to the brass he should have been shining on the bridge."

I can imagine that most any sailor (and lots of other people) followed Sabatini's story breathlessly

—I know I did, and I'm an ex-sailor myself. And I thoroughly enjoyed Commander Creighton's recent article. Just one word in it made me pause—"reprint." *Adventure* is not a reprint magazine.

I well remember Sabatini's story. A. S. H., who then was skipper of *Adventure*, ran a few of my short Navy yarns about the same time that "The Sea Hawk" was running. Curiosity caused me to dig out some of my old issues, and I find one of my yarns in the Nov. 10th, 1922, issue, which contains Part 3 of Sabatini's story. But thinking back, it seems that I remember something of one of Sabatini's earlier books being reprinted in *Adventure*. Can't recall whether it was "The Sea Hawk" or not. So, in this one instance, Commander Creighton may be right after all. What's the dope?

I've always had a warmer feeling for *Adventure* than most magazines—though the fact that my first published story appeared between her covers may have something to do with that. That doesn't account altogether, however, for my ears flapping up at the word "reprint."

Even though Commander Creighton may have been wrong (which I'm not at all sure that he was, in regard to this particular story), I'm sure he meant no slight. There are some things that I'll swear by: *Adventure* is one; officers of the United States Navy are another; and, of course, there are some others.

The *Proceedings* carries a "Discussion" department, and if you care to put me right on the above, and it proves that Commander Creighton was in error, I'll try to call to the attention of its readers the mistake. I hold a commission in the Reserve of the Navy, Intelligence Section, and am a member of the Institute, so believe it would be in order.

But until I hear from you, discretion bids that I hold my peace. You see, I'm not at all sure that I have the deadwood on the Commander as regards "The Sea Hawk." —LLOYD KOHLER

Old Fumigating Days

BILL ADAMS reminisces of the orange grove days that inspired his story in this issue: "Who Knows?"

Hope you like "Who Knows". That old fumigating job was about as hard work as ever I tackled, and I've tackled my share I think. More than once I've crawled out of a grove on my hands and knees with my heart pounding. Many and many's the dawn I've gone home with my face chalky white and feeling weak as a kitten. Pulling tents is no job for a weakling. I was a bit too old to be doing such work myself, but being a deepwater sailor and thereby knowing how to handle myself on the end of a rope I more than held my own with the young bucks. They always said "fumigating's a young buck's job".

And the young bucks used to try their hardest to kill me off. It isn't hard to kill a man off on a fumigating crew. I don't mean actually kill, of course. I mean make his life so miserable that he'll quit and some one else will step into his job. They never killed me off. Not much. I used to wear out two or three young bucks a night; used to put my weight on my pole rope and hop into it like we used to hop into it when we were hoisting topgallantsails after a blow with a rival ship on our beam. I had a good deal of fun. I got the name of being a man killer, whereas I merely happened to be an old sailor ashore. That fellow Dale—Dale wasn't his real name—was a queer duck. He and I pulled tents together all one summer.

He was lazy, horribly lazy; but after awhile he came to life and got to be a first rate tent puller. He didn't like the idea of me, an older man, putting one over on him, so he worked like fury lest I should. I kept stringing him along, doing a lot of his work without his knowing that I was doing it, till I had him hardened up and tough. One night he and I shifted thirty-two tents from one row of big trees to another in nine and a quarter minutes. That's traveling right along. The kicker was lost behind us. I think we did even better than that on later occasions, but that night stands out in my memory because it was on that night that Dale buckled in and pulled with me with the regularity and precision of a machine.

Poor old Dale! He was a drunken cuss, a gambling loafer. But you couldn't help liking him. There was something so queer in his eyes, in his smile, in the drawl of his voice. "Aw, hell, a man who'll fumigate's a damned fool." And next night he'd be out again, back at tent pulling. And the night when he kept his head so calmly when the mule capsized the machine I'll never forget. That was a close call for some fifteen hundred people in the town. Not a soul ever knew of it. It was one of those simple actions that pass without notice or comment and are forgotten. They don't use the gas machine these days. It went out some years ago, when a new type of gas came into use. I never worked with the new system. I think the foreman carries a metal cylinder containing liquid gas and doses the trees himself. But I'm not sure. I never pulled a tent after the war and I lost track of things. My fumigating days are done. Though I've a notion I could still flip the tents if I had to.—BILL ADAMS

Lost and Buried Treasure

A UNIQUE hobby—this reader is more interested in what happens to the man who found the treasure than in the treasure itself.

I have been an old traveler myself, and although connected a good deal with farming latterly still think of old mining and prospector days with gusto and pleasure—I am a three-continent man with bits of visits and knowledge of other countries and

have traveled on foot extensively nearly across continents.

I have at this time a hobby—that is a pursuit to rest myself for odd hours or two as the opportunity offers. I am interested in the names of persons who have found great treasures. For instance La Bell, a blacksmith, discovered Cobalt— The silver camp in Ontario, Canada. A cross of pearls was discovered at Roeburn, Western Australia, of pearls worth $50,000, I believe. The one who discovered it just left it—too good for humanity to mishandle, I guess.

The next man to come across it took money for it. I don't know these two men's names; would be pleased to know. I have seen a facsimile of the Welcome Nugget—the biggest ever found—in Australia. I saw a cast at the Hobart Museum, Tasmania. I don't know of the name of the finder; would be pleased to know—it was found at grass roots—gold. Then there is the biggest silver nugget found in Mexico, 2750 pounds, in Sonora. I don't know the name of the finder; would be pleased to learn, etc.

Now, such names would not be a wondrous knowledge, as most big families go two ways at least, so it's just a hobby, a pastime for odd hours.

—JOSEPH BELL HODGSON

Another Surdez Note

AS YOU all know from his fine letters which have been appearing from every corner of North Africa, Georges Surdez has been visiting with the Legionnaires. Now he is back in Oran, ready to write again; he couldn't very well write when there was so much to see in Bechar, Tadla, Khenifra or Beni Mellal.

However, you will be pleased to hear that he did dig himself in long enough to complete a novel—a real Legionnaire novel—which begins in the next issue.

To explain that note from Kasbah Tadla: I had just got there from Beni Mellal, which is some place. Not three miles away, on a spur of the mountain chain, the guard blockhouse that corks a pass against raiders is fired upon often; it is a center of troops, and a battalion of Legion had just come in from a prolonged column in dissident zone. Those Legionnaires who had come down from the military post up the slope a mile or so had to go back in a body, protected further by native auxiliaries, for, especially after dark, the region is unsafe and Chleuh marksmen snipe occasionally from the groves. I had had dinner the night before with Legion guys, friends of friends; we had demolished roast chicken and stewed hare together, without using much of that ice cold water which is the pride of the town.

I had started from Beni Mellal for Kasbah Tadla at dawn, to pass the various hot corners before the security service came in. In Tadla, I had some people to see, some stuff to look up, and had to arrange for the trip to Khenifra via Boujad over the little frequented trail winding through the Zayan valley. I did not wish to leave the Middle Atlas without dropping the Camp-Fire a note. Hence the scrawl.

The large cities of Morocco, Marrakesh, Casablanca, Fez, Meknes, hold little charm for me—their thriving European settlements crack false notes—but I left Khenifra the Red, former stronghold of Moha ou Hammou, with much regret. It is always an ache to leave the real places, like Bechar, Tadla, Khenifra. And one can never accept the fact that the parting will last. Yet, after one more trip to Morocco, in the Tafilalet zone this time, I shall have to lay off, for a space.

A captain wants me to come up (the Sahara is called up out here) because "I should see his bunch of guys (*mes bonhommes*)". There's a cot for me, a mount if I care to go out, even a bath rigged up. A lieutenant wants me to come and see him at his post, as he has a little time on his hands "and could show me his bunch of guys". For in the Legion each officer has the best outfit, each detachment the best officer. The current of loyalty that animates the whole is no less strong from above than from below. And they can take it without demoralization.

I have met the survivors of the Djilani show. They're going down again cheerfully. One of them, a kid of 18, speaks good English; he was eight years in the States. He was next to the Englishman, Cook, who went west as the ambushed section was fighting its way to the crest after the surprise attack of the Berber. Even when I am here, in Oran, with my machine, my documents and my snaps, I don't get much chance to work. Legionnaires, from privates up, Spahis, Saharan Company men, Trans-Saharian employees, by no means the least adventurous of the lot though civilians, come on leave, and it is not only a courtesy but a pleasure to go out with them or spend the evening over drinks, talking, making pencil marks on my maps, swapping yarns and cigarets.

The Legion, any of them will tell you, has the most modern weapons, equipment, the best officers, and the biggest bums writing about them of any group of fighting men. —GEORGES SURDEZ

Contest

THE "Can you name a month" contest announced in these columns in the December 1st issue has, as we expected it would, caught the fancy of many of our readers. Letters have come in by the hundreds. Please remember you still have till March 1st if you wish to send in your entry. —ANTHONY M. RUD

ASK Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Skiing

HOW to build a ski jump.

Request:—"I am interested in skiing. I have followed the sport for two years. I would like some information about how to build a ski jump. I would thank you for the following information:

1. What kind of hill is most suitable?
2. How long should it be?
3. How to make the jump? How long should the take-off be? I want the jump to be about six or eight feet high. Last winter I used a four foot one but it was not very satisfactory, as I could not get the right take-off. I did not fall but it did not seem suitable."—HAROLD R. KENT, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Reply, by Mr. W. H. Price:—Answering your enquiry with reference to building ski jump.

1. Any hill with an even gradient of about 20 degreees or so above where the jump is to be built is most preferable, and the gradient should be about the same for a sufficient distance below the point where the jumper lands to enable him to get a steady balance on landing.

2. The hill should be at least thirty or forty yards long for making a satisfactory jump, with sufficient distance above and below the take-off.

3. A simple way of building a jump, if materials are handy, is to lay two or three planks on top of an old packing case, and place snow over them. Another way is to stand two short sticks upright in the snow at the same level, and a yard or so apart, according to the intended width of the platform Stack fir branches against them on the uphill side and then build up a platform of snow, or alternately snow and branches, piling it high enough to rise well above the tops of the upright sticks. Beat the snow down well with a shovel and stamp it with the skis until it is quite solid.

Roughly speaking, for a small jump, the platform or take-off, thus built, should be two or three yards long; for a big jump it should be at least six yards.

Take good care to build the jump-up well at the sides in order to prevent any convexity in the middle which might cause the jumper to side-slip while taking off. Carefully stamp down the snow not only on the platform, but also up the track above it for ten or fifteen yards from the platform's edge.

For learning, the take-off should at first be quite low—not more than a foot high at its front edge. Three or four feet is a good height for the take-off, although for big competitions, the take-off is generally six or eight feet high, or even more. Raising the platform, while increasing the length of the jump, also increases the shock of landing, and therefore the difficulty of the jump. A platform sloping downwards at an angle of between five and ten degrees permits the longest jumps. It would be easy to find by experiment exactly the most favorable angle on any particular hill.

Now for a word about your equipment, which means a lot in becoming a proficient jumper. The skis should be long, strong and fairly heavy, and must be grooved underneath. They should be but little arched, and should not be flexible, otherwise the shock of landing after a big jump will make them

bend downwards in the middle so much as to check the pace and pitch the jumper forwards.

Wax or polish their under surfaces as much as you like; they can not be too slippery for jumping.

To carry a stick while jumping is useless, and, except for an expert on an easy jump, is exceedingly dangerous.

If I can be of any further assistance to you in building your jump, or if there are any other particular details you wish, just drop me a line.

Campeachy

A TREE native to the Caribbean countries and yielding a blood-red dye.

Request:—"Will you explain just what is meant by the name 'campeachy wood'?"

—A. G. S., Lawrence, Mass.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—The logwood tree furnished dyes to the Aztecs, and it held high place in the estimation of all European dyers from the date of its first introduction in Europe until the discovery of the aniline products, since which time logwood has found a rival in chemically produced colorings.

The tree is native in the countries of the Caribbean, notably Honduras, Haiti and Mexico, the finest quality coming from the shores of Campeachy Bay. This has led to its sometimes being called campeachy wood.

This tree has a crooked, deformed stem, and grows from 20 to 40 feet high, with crooked irregular branches armed with long horns. The leaves are pinnate (from pinna, meaning feather, or having parts arranged along two sides of an axis, or stem); the flowers, small and yellowish, growing in long clusters at the extremities of the spinous branches. The wood is of firm texture and red color; hence the name bloodwood by which it is sometimes known. And it is so heavy as to sink in water. The coloring principle of logwood is an organic substance in the timber which contains a chemical called hæmatoxylin, that can be liberated by fermentation.

Logwood is the most important of the many valuable woods shipped from the Republic of Haiti.

Platinum

VICTOR SHAW suggests that the following first-hand prospecting information, quoted from a correspondent in the Goodnews Bay, Alaska, country, may be of general interest:

"You asked me some time ago about how the platinum at Goodnews Bay was coming along. Two men from those diggings came up after their summer's work with fairly reliable information. There are fourteen white men and two natives on one large creek with two smaller branches. I don't know just what area is covered but it's not very large, about twenty claims altogether. All the men are making ten dollars a day or better up to about twenty dollars. The discoverer, Charlie Thorsen, is doing about the poorest of them all. The two men or rather the one who gave me the information says the proposition isn't very rich but that all who have ground there have a life-time job if the ground runs the same as it has been running and it looks as if it might be the case. The product is coarse platinum with varying amount of osmiridium and a little gold. One of the natives got a hundred ten dollars an ounce for one shipment that turned out to be nearly pure osmiridium. The man who gave me the above has a reputation for exaggeration but he left in my safe a bottle with what he said was 16 ounces of platinum in it which lends weight to what he said. Besides this, the lady next door, whose husband has some of the best ground down below, got some optimistic letters from him. But there's no call for a stampede anyway."—PAUL ESTLE, Bethel, Alaska.

Dutch East Indies

PROSPECTS for an American seeking work in the coffee growing business.

Request:—"1. In what parts of Java, Sumatra, and the East Indies is coffee growing most general?

2. In what capacities are white men employed on coffee plantations?

3. Roughly, what do such positions pay?

4. What training and experience are necessary to secure such positions?

5. What are the names and addresses of the principal companies to whom one might apply, particularly American companies, if any such are in the field?

6. Is there prospect of an inexperienced man, who had, however, studied coffee-growing, getting remunerative work on the plantations or in the coffee industry?

7. Aside from coffee, what fields are open to whites in the Indies—that is, fields for work in which a man might prepare himself by home study?"

—R. SCOTT, Indianapolis, Ind.

Reply, by Capt. R. W. v. R. de Sturler:—1. Coffee plantations cover a very large part of the whole island. Up to about ten or fifteen years ago, the coffee cultivation was mostly under government control or supervision; today, however, a few of the big Dutch Trading companies acquired controlling interests in various large plantations. The very best coffee, though called "Java" coffee commercially, is really grown on a private estate in Sumatra, the management of which is an affair entirely entrusted to members of the family.

2 and 3. To begin with, every white man employed on Dutch Javanese coffee plantations is a Hollander by birth or a descendant of a Hollander and native mother. At least, I can not recall having known or heard of any foreigner being employed. Whites are employed as overseers whose work consists in watching the natives performing the manual labor on the plantation and whose pay does not ex-

ceed 300 florins, about $120.00 American per month; his living expenses are, of course, more or less in proportion to his pay; on the other hand, his is a lonely life and not enviable, his recreation consisting in reading and, possibly, here and there receiving or visiting another overseer on an adjacent estate or plantation whose life is no more pleasant than his own.

4. The position of overseer, though the lowest and most modest a white man can obtain or would wish to accept requires several qualifications which are imperative, besides some knowledge of coffee cultivation: (a) he must speak the Dutch language fluently and (b) he must speak Malayan or Javanese sufficiently well to enable him to cope verbally with the natives he supervises.

5. To my knowledge there is no American concern growing coffee in the Dutch East Indies. America consumes almost exclusively South and Central American coffees. Real Java coffee is not even obtainable here in any quantity exceeding a few pounds, representing samples. I am giving you hereunder the names and addresses of the two largest firms dealing in Java coffee whom you might approach should you decide seriously to make an attempt for employment: "Handelsvereeniging Amsterdam", Amsterdam, Holland, and "De Nederlandsch-Indische Handels Maatschappy", Amsterdam, Holland.

6. Having been born myself in Java and visiting it every chance I have for its tropical beauty (it is said to be the most beautiful tropical island), I sincerely regret that I can not honestly encourage your desire to engage in work there, if you are, however, so situated that you can afford to support yourself at the cost of from $100 to $120 American per month for at least 6 months during which period you would have to learn enough of the languages mentioned, you might succeed in obtaining temporary employment at either Batavia, Samarang or Surabaya to tide yourself over until some opening on the plantations gives you a chance to find the job you are after. If not, take my advice and stay in the U. S.

7. Remember that the little island of Java supports some forty million people, thirty-nine and one-half of which are natives, Chinese, etc., who do all the manual labor which a white man can not and does not perform, first on account of the climate and, secondly, on account of his dignity, so that outside of plantation supervising, the only other field he could make himself useful in (if it is not occupied by a Chinese or halfblood) is a clerkship, provided he speaks and writes the languages mentioned fluently, and the pay for that sort of work in competition with natives of China and Java is naturally less than even that of the overseer, whereas his life (as a white man) in the city would cost him more.

I am really sorry to repeat that I am not able to encourage you in your project but, in my opinion, it is better to discourage a man in time than to have him go through bitter experiences which are certain to result from an attempt such as you contemplate.

Motor

WHY racing cars may reach as high a maximum as 8000 crankshaft revolutions a minute.

Request:—"I have read that several of the 91 cubic inch racers, having been entered in Indianapolis this last year, have developed as many as 8000 crankshaft revolutions per minute. How is it that such a maximum is reached, whereas maximum crankshaft revolutions of standard cars on the market range from 2800 to 3600?"

—BERNARD K. MURRAY, Piercefield, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Edmund B. Neil:—While one or two of the 91 cu. in. racing car engines built at the present time may run as high as 8000 crankshaft revolutions per minute, the customary speed is not quite as great as this. From 6500 to 7000 r. p. m. might be considered more normal. High crankshaft speeds such as these are obtained through the use of first a very carefully balanced engine with exceedingly strong moving parts to withstand these speeds, and secondly through careful valve and port design plus the use of the supercharger. Without a supercharger it would possibly be difficult to obtain speeds in excess of around 5000 r. p. m. with an engine of this kind, or at least to have it until the maximum horsepower had such a speed.

With the supercharger in action it is possible to continue to increase the engine power output as the speed increases up to the maxima given above. It is possible to obtain in excess of 100 H.P. from an engine of 91 cu. in. displacement. In fact, I believe powers around 140 have been achieved for racing car engines of this size. Maximum engine speeds of the ordinary car are often limited, due to inadequate port and valve size, carbureter dimensions, and weight of lubricating parts. Light pistons, the application of two or three carbureters with short manifolds, and similar changes make increased speeds possible without using superchargers, although some means of forcing air into the cylinders is necessary if speeds in the range of those attainable with racing cars are to be obtained, and increased power delivered. I say this because many engines might run at much higher speeds than they do, but they would be unable to deliver as much power at the higher speed as they would at some speed much less.

Range

MANY of the Western States still offer opportunities for stock raising, but a good ranch comes high.

Request:—"Which State in the western part of the country has the best ranches, ranges, and general location for cattle raising? I am most anxious to learn about conditions in Wyoming.

How much is a good ranch worth? What does a good sized one cost?"—ROBERT BALLARD, Montclair, Mass.

Reply, by Mr. Frank Earnest:—It would be rather difficult to say just which State has the best ranches and general cattle raising conditions, although my preference would be Colorado, mainly on account of the climatic conditions. Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, Montana, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Utah, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, California and Texas are all good cattle ranching States.

Wyoming is strictly a stock raising State, however; it is pretty well sheeped out. There are some very good cattle ranches for sale in Wyoming for from twelve thousand up to fifty thousand dollars. I know of one very good ranch for thirty thousand dollars which I believe is about the best I know of. That price does not include any stock. A good ranch is worth from five thousand dollars up, according to location, acreage, improvements, etc., and costs accordingly. Then of course you can locate a homestead of anywhere from 40 to 640 acres which the Government gives you free. You must, of course, pay a small filing fee and make improvements on the above.

If you are seriously interested in buying a cattle ranch, and will write me again telling me how much capital you can command and whether you have any knowledge of the cattle business, and if so to what extent, I will be glad to put you in touch with parties having ranches for sale, or help you in any way I may be of service.

Marines

THE duties of men on Asiatic station.

Request:—"Kindly answer these questions in regard to the U. S. Marines:

1. What are the duties of a Marine (private) in Peking, China?

2. How long does a Marine stay in China when sent there for duty?

3. What are the requirements to get into the Marine Aviation Corps?"—REUBEN OVERLAND, Petersburg, No. Dak.

Reply, by Captain F. W. Hopkins:—1. Duties of a Marine private in Peking, China, at the American Legation Guard (the only detail of Marines in Peking, now named Peiping) about the same as any Marine anywhere; in general, guard duty within and on the walls and gate of the American Legation, drill and the preparation for the defense of the legation in case of trouble. It is more or less of a fort and kept garrisoned by about 400 Marines. Marines serve there also in special duty jobs as orderlies and messengers for the Legation itself.

2. Details for duty in China, at Peiping, are as a rule for two years, the usual run of foreign service. If a man is sent there after, say, a year at Manila, he may only remain at Peiping for one year, making a total of two on Asiatic station. Marines' service in Shanghai, on the expedition, is for no longer than two years if they remain that long. There are practically no Marines ashore in China now except the permanant guard at the Legation.

3. Requirements for Marine Aviation: enlistment must be in the regular Marine Corps, and transfer effected to Aviation, or by special assignment to aviation. No especial requirement other than recommendation of one's superiors as to ability, some mechanical and aviation aptitude, and the existence of vacancies to be filled. Of course, to one already trained in that work the way is easier. Transfer to this branch is difficult just now.

Houseboat

WATCH out for sandbars and swirls on your way down Old Father of Waters.

Request:—"I am thinking of some time taking a small houseboat, twenty-five or thirty feet long, down the Embarrass into the Wabash, from the Wabash to the Ohio and down the Ohio to the 'Big Muddy', then to New Orleans.

Would these rivers be deep enough to float the boat?

What would be the best time of the year to start?

Are there enough towns on the banks of these rivers so that I could buy food at reasonable intervals?

Would it be best to be armed as a protection against rough characters?

Where would I be most likely to meet them?

Are there maps I can get that show the rivers in detail, the depth, width and other things I must know?

Are there navigation lights on the Ohio and Mississippi?

Can you give me any information about the peculiarities of these rivers which I would have to watch for?

How long would it take a houseboat to go down these rivers by merely floating? Would it be practicable?

Would it be best to have an outboard motor?

How much money would I need to pay expenses?

After getting to New Orleans, what would I do with the boat? Sell it to some negro? I have heard that that is the way it is done."—LEONARD PEAK, Charleston, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. George A. Zeer:—May and June would be ideal months for the trip you have in mind and there would be sufficient water to float your houseboat, while September and October would be good for the fall. The Wabash enters the Ohio River just below Lock and Dam No. 49, about four miles below Uniontown, Ky. You must familiarize yourself with the Ohio River, in order that you do not go over the dams. Lock and dam No. 50 are on the left bank of the river as the streams flows. It is advisable to speak with the lock tenders, since it is they who lock your craft through. There are no locks on the Mississippi River below Cairo.

Extreme care is necessary to navigate this stream for the uninitiated, since it is a dangerous one at all times on account of its sandbars and swirls. Follow

the bends, is the advice given by ancient navigators and pilots.

Yes, there are plenty of towns along the shores of both streams, but I would keep a supply of stores on board for an emergency, since you might strike an uninhabited spot at nightfall and want to eat. The filling of your pantry is up to you, how much you eat and how many are on the trip.

In regards to carrying arms, you will have to follow your own conscience; there are petty thieves and bums even in the big cities. Do not permit any one on your boat and when you tie up at night, just be sure where you are.

In regards to maps of the Ohio, write to the U. S. Engineers, Customs House, Louisville, Ky. They are 25 cents each, since they come in plates; this will come high, as there are a large number for the Ohio and Mississippi. I would suggest to write to the superintendent of Light House Service, Cincinnati, O., for a lighthouse book of the Ohio and to the same at St. Louis, for a book of the lower Mississippi River; enclose 50 cents each.

The Wabash River is approximately 130 miles from the mouth of the Ohio at Cairo. It would take you about three days with stopovers to reach that port, from there you have 971 miles of Mississippi River. Be careful where you tie up, as an inviting looking bank before morning might have pulled you and the boat with it into the depths of the river; rather look for a low flat bank.

Yes, I would take an outboard motor, since you can always fill up your tanks and it would permit you many idle hours in which to enjoy the scenery. Two weeks after you leave Cairo ought to see you tied up at New Orleans, and in regards to money the amount you expect to spend a day, gasoline, eats and the return fare is what you need.

They don't pay much for boats of the houseboat kind. In going down the Mississippi River follow your light aids closely, since some of the towns are easily passed up on account of the levees and the low visibility of your boat. Since from the deck of one of these boats the Mississippi will look to you like an ocean. A good pair of field glasses and life preserver—the latter could also be used as a pillow—would not be amiss.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organizations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, Copeland Manor, Libertyville, Illinois.

Yachting HENRY W. RUBINKAM, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating GEORGE W. SUTTON, 232 Madison Ave., Room 801, New York City.

Motor Camping JOHN D. LONG, 610 W. 116th St., New York City.

Motor Vehicles *Operation, legislative restrictions and Traffic.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

Automotive and Aircraft Engines *Design, operation and maintenance.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes wing shooting.* JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers *including foreign and American makes.*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 835 Gladden Road, Grandview, Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Health hazard of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercise, food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE.

Hiking CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Camping and Woodcraft HORACE KEPHART, Bryson City, N. C.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect; how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc.*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Precious Stones *Their mining, cutting, polishing and all technical information regarding them.*—F. G. ESTERLIN, 210 Post Street, San Francisco, Cal.

Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Haitian Agricultural Corporation, Cap-Haitien, Haiti.

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer, 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS GREENE, U. S. N. R., 231 Eleventh St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

U. S. Marine Corps CAPT. F. W. HOPKINS, 507 No. Harper, Hollywood, Cal.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions on stock promotion.*—LIEUTENANT JEFFREY R. STARKS, 1408 "N" Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., care *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, 3758 81st Street, Jackson Heights, New York City.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—THOMAS H. DAMERON, 7 Block "S". Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles and amphibians; their customs, habits and distribution.*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, American Museum of Natural History, New York, N. Y.

Ichthyology *Fishes and lower aquatic vertebrates.*—GEORGE S. MYERS, Stanford University, Box 821, Calif.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

Linguistics and Ethnology *(a) Racial and tribal tradition, history and psychology; folklore and mythology. (b) Languages and the problems of race migration, national development and descent (authorities and bibliographies). (c) Individual languages and language-families; interrelation of tongues, their affinities and plans for their study.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 W. 23rd St., New York City.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung ROBERT W. GORDON, care of *Adventure.*

Football JOHN B. FOSTER, American Sports Pub. Co., 45 Rose Street, New York City.

Baseball FREDERICK LIEB, *The Evening Telegram*, 73 Dey Street, New York City.

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, 73 Farmington Ave., Longmeadow, Mass.

Tennis FRED HAWTHORNE, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune*, New York City.

Basketball I. S. ROSE, 321 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

Bicycling ARTHUR J. LEAMOND, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Swimming LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skating FRANK SCHREIBER, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Hockey "DANIEL," *The Evening Telegram*, 73 Dey St., New York City.

Archery EARL B. POWELL, 524 West 3rd St., Los Angeles, Cal.

Boxing JAMES P. DAWSON, The New York *Times*, Times Square, New York City.

Fencing JOHN V. GROMBACH, 1061 Madison Ave., New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America.—HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apt. 504, 2115 F Street N. W., Washington, D. C.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping; names, tonnages, dimensions, service, crews, owners of all American documental steam, motor, sail, yacht and unrigged merchant vessels. Vessels lost, abandoned, sold to aliens and all Government owned vessels.*—HARRY E. RIESEBERG.

The Sea Part 3 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 5 *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 6 *Arctic Ocean. (Siberian Waters).*—CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure.*

Hawaii DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

South Sea Islands JAMES STANLEY MEAGHER, 4322 Pine Street, Inglewood, Calif.

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNOR, Universal City, California.

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